

THE HUMOURS
OF THE COURT
AND OTHER POEMS



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THE HUMOURS OF THE COURT

AND OTHER POEMS



THE HUMOURS OF THE COURT

A Comedy

AND OTHER POEMS

BY

ROBERT BRIDGES



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THE HUMOURS OF THE COURT

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

RICHARD Duke of Milan (RICARDO).

FREDERICK Secretary to Diana.

Sir GREGORY Her Major-domo.

ST. NICHOLAS A Courtier: suitor of Laura.

TRISTRAM Servant to Frederick.

DIANA Countess of Belflor.

LAURA Her adopted sister: daughter to Gregory.

FLORA Maid to Diana.

MARCELA, DOROTHY, KATHARINE, ROSE. Maids.

Scene at Belflor, the residence of Diana.

Duration of time, three days: one to each act.

ACT I.

Terrace before the palace in the gardens of Belflor.

*Chairs set out. FREDERICK and RICARDO. TRIS-
TRAM stands at a little distance, edging up to over-
hear.*

F. Your secret's safe with me. I should be hurt
To think that there was any man on earth
Whom you could trust before me : and if my place
Here in the court can help you in your love,
Reckon upon me.

R. I do, and hope some day
It may be in my good fortune to repay you
For such a favour.

F. Favour ! what a word
To an old friend !

R. Nay, do not misconstrue me.

F. I own I am jealous, Richard, of the time
We have lived apart. There was a touch of fear 10
Mixed with my joy, when you broke in upon me
This morning, that the ten years had not spared me.
You find me changed ? Say, doth my countenance
Wear the smug livery of the world ?

R. Nay, friend ;
I see no trace of that.

F. Then I remember
While I have played you have been within the mill :
And should I beat your coat there must fly out
Clouds of that dusty, damned experience.
Is not that so, your grace?

R. Go on : provoke me 19
As you were wont.

F. The best remembrance, Richard,
Drowns in the world : and how should college days
Live in your memory as they do in mine?
'Tis no such lustre to your brilliant life
That we were comrades in Utopia,
That commonwealth of study and idleness,
Where sport, adventure, poetry and music
Were sauced with virgin-juice, a dish for gods.

R. As if I could forget !

F. Ay, but the spirit !
Think you we should have spoken of favours then?
In those days, Richard, we were used to think 30
Our teachers never had tasted life like ours ;
Their staid propriety not logically
Deducible from essences as fresh
As angels of the sunrise. Shall the boys
Now say the same of us? By heaven you fright me :
The heart of manhood not to outlive a dog !
Then my old grudge against you.

R. What was that?

F. Your rank, which first drew us apart : but now
To meet again and have you in my debt
Is favour, by your leave, above repayment. 40

R. Still as proud as a peacock.

F. Could I do you a service.
But can I? See, I am here the Countess' secretary :
To make believe that you are a stranger to me
Were breach of trust.

R. But love makes tricks of crimes.

F. And if she has often seen you, how suppose
She will not know you?

R. 'Tis so long ago
That now in my disguise I have no fear.
You did not know me.

F. That was but your beard.

R. She hath not seen my beard : and 'tis impossible
She should suspect. She has treated me all along 50
With such disdain, that I, in love as I am,
Can scarce believe I venture; but—I am mad.
Nothing could keep me back. Hear all my story,
And then see how I am changed. 'Tis three years
since

I saw her first at Rome. His Holiness
Gave a reception; I with some of the guests
Had strayed to view the galleries: suddenly
Out of a group before me—as if a Grace,
That lived in Rafael's brain to mock his hand,
Had stepped alive amongst us to rebuke 60
Our admiration of the fresco stuff—
She turned and faced me.

Quick as I tell, I read my fate: I knew
What I was born for. Love's first ecstasy
Fooled me to a false security. That night

I wrote my passion; and by such presumption
Offended. My after patience met with scorn,
My importunity anger. I then desisted,
Trying if by absence I could work my cure.
Twelve months of trial bring me here to-day 70
With no hope left but this; that living near her
Her daily and familiar sight may blunt
My strained ideal passion; or if this
Quench not my fancy, it may serve to feed it
With something tangible and wholesomer
Than the day dreams of sick imagination.

F. I wish your cure; for, to say truth, the Countess
Is somewhat odd; as you will see yourself.

R. 'Tis for my cure I come.—Your servant there,
Might he not hear us?

F. (to T.). Tristram, just look round 80
If you can see the Countess.

T. (aside, going). What is there here now that I
may not know?

That I am sent off? Who can this stranger be
So suddenly familiar with my master?
And comes here for his cure! Here to this haunt
Of women and lunatics! I'll find him out.

[*Exit singing to himself.*]

F. My man is trusty and dull; devoted to me.

R. Excuse my caution: if we were overheard,—
If any guessed I were the Duke of Milan,
The venture which I make would be my ruin: 90
All that I ask is secrecy. In this letter
I have written the Countess from myself, as Duke,

Recommendation of myself, the bearer,
As one Ricardo, begging for the same
Protection in her court for some few days.
Present me as a stranger: had I been such
You could not have refused.

F. Trust me to serve you:
But give your letter to the major-domo:
He attends her in the grounds; when they come by
I'll point him out. Better know nought of me. 100
What think you of the gardens?

R. All this hour
I have seemed in Paradise: and the fair prospect
Hath quieted my spirit: I think I sail
Into the windless haven of my life
To-day with happy omens: as the stir
And sleep-forbidding rattle of the journey
Was like my life till now. Here all is peace:
The still fresh air of this October morning,
With its resigning odours; the rich hues
Wherein the gay leaves revel to their fall; 110
The deep blue sky; the misty distances,
And splashing fountains; and I thought I heard
A magic service of meandering music
Threading the glades and stealing on the lawns.
Was I mistaken?

Re-enter TRISTRAM unperceived; he stands by listening at back, as if waiting to be observed.

F. Nay, nay: there was music.
But why the jocund morn so dissolutely

Forestalls the faint and lulling chants of eve
 I must explain. The Countess, whom you court,
 Hath an unwholesome temper; what its nature
 You, when you have seen it, will be as like to guess
 As any other. She hath a restless spirit
 And eager; and, what seems a sign of note,
 Suffers from jealousy without a cause.
 She is full of fancies; and hath, like a school-girl,
 Drawn up a code of her peculiar notions,
 Whereby, in place of commonsense and manners,
 She rules her petty court with tyrannies
 Of fine and forfeit. Then, although she lives
 Pampered with luxury, and hath a sense
 O'ergreedy of all that's offered, yet she takes 130
 Her pleasure feverously, and pines in plenty.
 'Tis a derangement.—The music which you heard
 Was a diversion of my own contrivance
 To pass the hour: the evil spirit within her
 Yields most to music.

R. What you say is strange.

F. 'Tis unaccountable.

T. (coming forward). And so you'd say,
 Knew you the cause.

F. Tristram!

R. (aside). Now damn this fellow!
 (*To T.*) Perhaps you know it, sir?

T. I know it, yes:
 But may not speak.

F. I bid you speak and show 140
 My friend your wisdom.

T. To your secrets then
Add this. The Countess is in love.

R. and F. In love!

T. In love.

R. and F. With whom?

T. With whom . . .

R. But say with whom.

T. Stay. I will say with whom.

'Tis one to whom she dare not make avowal.

F. Say whom you mean.

T. Why, who but me!

F. The fool!

We wish not for your jests. Where is the Countess?

T. She is coming by the lake, sir.

F. Stand aside,

We have business now.

T. (aside, going). The fish bite very well:

I hooked them both at first cast of my fly.

(Sings to himself.)

F. 'Twould make us brothers, Richard.

R. Brothers?—how? 150

F. Having your secret, I must give you mine.

I also love a lady in the Court,

Secretly too, as you, though with success;

And she is foster-sister to your lady.

The prudery with which the Countess rules

Drave us to hide our liking at the first;

And as that grew, deception still kept pace,

Enhancing the romance of our delight

With stolen intercourse. But these last days

A cloud hath risen: for the lady's father, 160
 (That's the old major-domo, whom I spoke of,)
 Hath been befooled to give his daughter away
 To a wreathed ass, a cousin of the Countess,
 Who hath herself approved the match. You find
 me

In this dilemma, whether to confess
 My love for Laura,—that's the lady's name—
 Braving the Countess' anger, or carry her off,
 And after sue for favour. (*Music heard.*)
 Hark! here they come.

I'll tell you more hereafter.

R. Ay, do: but now
 Forget not me. (*Aside.*) By Jove, he has capped
 my story.— 170
 Diana's sister too: and I entrapped
 To aid in her elopement.

Enter DIANA, LAURA, GREGORY, *and* ST. NICHOLAS;
with attendant musicians and singers, who go out
when the music is done.

MUSIC.

Fire of heaven, whose starry arrow,
 Pierces the veil of timeless night:
 Molten spheres, whose tempests narrow
 Their floods to a beam of gentle light,
 To charm with a moon ray quenched from fire
 The land of delight, the land of desire.

F. (to *R.*). That is the major-domo Gregory
With the white locks. Take him aside, he is deaf.

(*During next verse R. makes his way to G., and
they are seen talking aside during the other dia-
logue.*)

Music continued—

Smile of love—a flower planted,
Sprung in the garden of joy that art:
Eyes that shine with a glow enchanted,
Whose spreading fires encircle my heart,
And warm with a noonray drenched in fire
My land of delight, my land of desire!

D. I envy much the melancholy spirit
Who wove that strain. The verses too were fetched
Out of a deeper well than common passion
Hath skill to draw from. Frederick, who is the poet
That I must love for this?

F. Love for my art 191
Hath made your ladyship too generous
Towards a most humble workman. 'Tis my own.

D. Ah me! what must it be to be a poet,
And in the abandoned humour that men take with,
To give forth! O 'tis godlike! but the music,—
'Tis that you excel in: it hath a melancholy
Which springs of love.

F. The whole world sprang of love;
And art is but the praise the creature makes
To the Creator.

D. True: and the best praise 200
Is but love's echo. I mean you love some lady.
She is very happy. Would I knew her name.

F. When I shall love a lady, and have means
To court her, you shall hear gay music.

D. Means!
Is she so mercenary?

F. Your ladyship
Must take this lady of your own creation
With all her faults. Love is a luxury
You may suspect in me when I have money
To spend in presents.

D. Whom you love I know not:
But whether it be a queen or peasant girl, 210
'Tis all one. Love exalteth above rank
Or wealth; yet in Love's ritual 'twere well wished
To express your homage fully. Ho, Sir Gregory!
Sir Gregory!

G. Your ladyship!

D. Give Frederick
A hundred ducats at my household charge.

G. (*to F.*). What said my lady?

F. (*aside*). An open insult.

T. (*to G.*). Thou'rt to give my master
A hundred ducats for a wherewithal
To make his lady presents.

F. (*to T.*). Silence, idiot.

T. He heard not: you may lose the money.

G. My lady, 220
A gentleman from Milan. (*Presenting R.*)

D. (*half aside*¹). Milan, say you?
I thought we had done with Milan.

R. Queen of Belflor,
This letter from the duke explains my coming.

D. Welcome, sir, whencesoe'er: but if from Milan,
Bringst thou this letter, or did it bring thee?

R. I bring the letter, madam: and 'tis writ
But in my favour.

D. Good: on that assurance
I'll read. (*Opens letter.*)

(*F. has passed across to make way for G. and R.,
coming near LAURA, front, side.*)

L. (*to F.*). You have my glove?

F. Yes.

L. When I drop the other,
Exchange them secretly. 229

D. (*reading to audience*). "The bearer, my servant Ricardo, having hurt his challenger in a duel, I beg for him a few days' protection in your court, till some consequent rancour be appeased. Let my long silence and absence win for me this little grace." With reason and good courtesy asked. Ricardo, Make your asylum here. Sir Gregory Will tell you that such residence implies Certain restraints, in which we look to find Compliance.

¹ The half-asides in the play in presence of Gregory are spoken either with indifference as to whether G. will hear, or with confidence that he will not.

(LAURA drops a glove which F. snatches up, and is seen by the audience to exchange for another.)

N. (*stepping forward between F. and L.*). I pray thee, sir; nay sir, I pray. My duty.

F. Is't thy glove?

N. Yes, when it falls. 240

F. How so? When heaven doth rain, it rains for all.

Thou shouldst have picked it up.

N. I ran to do so,

But thou anticipatedest me. I pray

Give 't me, that I restore it to my lady.

F. Claim not her gloves, sir, till her gloves are thine,

Now thou anticipatest.

N. Sir Gregory!

A question.

G. Eigh!

D. What is this, St. Nicholas?

N. I beg Sir Gregory judge 'twixt me and Frederick.

My lady Laura, having dropped her glove,

He picks it up, and would return it to her; 250

Which I forbid, claiming the privilege

As her accepted lover.

D. A mighty question.

Who can determine it?

T. That can I. The lady

Should drop the other, and let each have one.

D. St. Nicholas would claim both, Sir Solomon.
(To F.) Give me the glove. I thank you much;
 and now

I offer better matter for discussion:
 The chairs were set on purpose. Let all be seated.
 Laura, take back thy glove; and sit thou there. 259
 You, Frederick, on my right. *(To R.)* 'Tis what I
 call

The Muses' *matinée*. These morning hours,
 Which others waste, we may devote to wisdom,
 And solve some learned question; as was done
 In ancient Athens; where, as Plato shows,
 Nothing was more admired than dialogues
 In science and philosophy. I will hold
 Such an assembly: we will each in turn
 Make answer to the question I propose.
 And that shall be of love. I'll question why
 Love is called bitter-sweet.

N. Now, by my heart, 270
 A pretty question. May I speak the first?

D. In turn, in turn. Hark, if I put it thus,
 What is love's chiefest pain? How think you, Fred-
 erick?

The speech lies with Ricardo, as our guest.

R. Am I to answer?

DIANA

TRISTRAM Stands

LAURA

FREDERICK

NICHOLAS

GREGORY

RICHARD

D. Ay, sir: you must tell
What, in your judgment, is love's chiefest pain.

R. 'Tis well, my lady, I am not one of those,
Who, when they would speak wisely, go about
To weigh their pros and cons; in doing which
They but confess their common thoughts are folly, 280
Which they must mask. I have a steady mind,
Which thinking cannot mend: and well I know
The greatest pain in love is when a man
Hath loved a lady most deservedly,
And been most undeservedly refused;
Yet, spite of her contempt, is silly-true,
And wastes his days. This is the pain of love;
Or if another can be shewn to match,
I forfeit claim to wisdom in such matters. 289

D. Very well said, sir, if your speech be taken
To include the parallel, the equal pain
Of any woman who thus loves a man.
What say you, Frederick?

F. Ricardo is in fault,
For love being not returned is but half love;
In which imperfect state love's pain or bliss
Cannot be known: to love and be beloved
Is the required condition. But when two hearts,
Encountering in this mortal maze, have knit
Their preordained espousals, and together
In moonlight meeting and sweet conference, 300
Signed the surrendering treaties of their love;
If fate, or circumstance, or other's will
Should then oppose them, and thrust in to sever

The new-spun cords with which they are bound; I
say

This is the hardest pain that love can shew.

D. Ha! you speak logic; that love's perfect pain
Cannot exist but in love's perfect state.

Laura, 'tis thou to speak.

L. What shall I say?

D. Give thy opinion; or, in want of matter,
Be critical. A gloss may hit the mark 310
Where the text fails.

L. If Frederick has said well,
That love's pain is a pain of love returned,
The pain of love must come from being loved.

D. O, most adorable simplicity!
Before thy lover, too! St. Nicholas,
What wilt thou say?

N. Beshrew my science now,
If Lady Laura have not hit the mark.
'Tis vulgar error that would make distinction
'Twixt pain and joy; which are, as life and death,
Inseparables. The shadowed images 320
Cast on the wall of this memorial cave,
This earth, wherein we dwell, are things of nought,
But serving to mislead our darkling sense:
Nay health and strength are but the habitude
Of this delusion. Ask your ruddy clown
Of love; will he not tell you 'tis a pleasure
Which moves the plain heart of the natural man?
But to the poet, what is love to him?
'Tis like heaven's rainbow scarf, woven of all hues

Of pain and joy; an eagle and a snake 330
Struggling in the void and crystalline abysm
Of life and death. And love's pain, what is that?
I have compared it to a sunbeamed tear,
Whose single pearl broiders the marble lids
Of some tall Sphinx, that with impassive smile
Dreams o'er the desert; whence 'twas gathered up
Of earthly dew and the pale sparkle of stars,
To fall in silent lightning on the sands;
Which, at the touch magnifical, bloom forth
In irresistible fecundity. 340

Such is love's pain, as it hath lit on me;
And tintured by it I would dream my day,
Nor count the sailing hour, but when night falls
Be closèd up, like a belated bee
In the pale lily of death.

D. Now you all hear!

R. (aside). Heavens! a belated bee!

D. Thy lover, Laura;

What say'st thou?

L. O beautiful!

D. And you, Ricardo?

R. Capital, capital!

D. Sir Gregory!

Sir Gregory!

G. Eigh.

D. 'Tis now thy turn to speak.

G. Pardon, your Ladyship; but at the outset 350
I missed the question, and for lack of it
Have followed ill.

D. The question we discuss
Is this, What is the chiefest pain of love?

G. The chiefest what?

D. Pain.

G. Ah! the pain of love.

D. 'Tis now thy turn to speak.

G. Oh, is't my turn?

The chiefest pain of love; I am asked to say
What that is?

D. Yes.

G. Your ladyship knows well

You ask of one who has lived to study truth
From nature's only teacher;—without which
I would not speak. But since you have often heard
Your sainted mother tell from what sad cause . 361
She made my Laura your adopted sister,
Saving my orphan in the only loss
That can befall a babe, its mother's care,
You know how by that loss there came to me
The chiefest pain of love; which can, I think,
But hap to wedded spirits, who have joyed
In mutual life: wherein, may heaven forgive me
If the remembrance of my joy awake
Sorrow with thankfulness, the balance being 370
So far on the good side, spite of the pain:
Yet if I speak of it now without more tears
Than ye can see, 'tis that the founts are dried:
Time hath not helped me otherwise. I pray
God, who is merciful, to shield all here
From like calamity.

F. I say Amen
To good Sir Gregory.

R. And amen for me.

Enter FLORA to D.

D. What is it, Flora?

Fl. My lady, the merchant's come.

D. What merchant?

Fl. The Venetian with the silks
Your ladyship bespoke.

D. (rising). Do you hear, Laura? 380
Your stuffs at last. Our matinée, my friends,
Is interrupted, an important matter
Unfortunately calls me away. Come, Laura:
There'll scarce be time to get the silks made up
Before your wedding. Come and choose them with
me.

St. Nicholas, we shall need thee too; 'tis nothing
Unless thine eye is pleased.

N. I dote on silks.
I love their fine prismatic cadences.
Yet these Venetian colours to my taste
Are over-saturate: I'd have them cast 390
With the Doge's ring in the sea. A good year's soaking
Would bring them down into that faded softness,
Which is a banquet to the cultured eye.

D. Ricardo, do you attend Sir Gregory,
And see your lodging. Come, St. Nicholas;
Come, Laura!

[*Exit with LAURA and ST. NICHOLAS. FLORA following.*]

G. (*to R.*). I wait upon you, if it please
you

To visit your apartments. Tell me pray
What men you bring.

[*Exit with R. making signs.*

F. (*taking out the glove with the letter*). Thank
heaven, now I may read.

(*Aside.*) What saith my love? what hope?

T. (*aside*). Another letter! 399

Whence got he this?

F. O blessed paper!

T. (*aside*). Watch him!

F. (*reading, away from T.*). Dearest; all is lost.
They mistake my hesitation for consent. My father
has fixed the marriage for three days hence. I dared
not say the truth. I know not what I said. My
senses left me . . .

(*Aloud.*) Death! death!

T. (*aside*). By Gemini, this is a nasty one.

F. (*reading as before*). But be sure I never con-
sented. If there is no other escape, I must fly.
Come to-night to the garden. I will be at my win-
dow at eleven o'clock.

(*Aloud.*) Thank God, thank God. I breathe
again. I shall see thee to-night.

T. Pray, sir, 414

Is anything the matter?

F. Eh! ah! what said I?

T. That you were dead, and then alive again.

F. 'Tis true.

T. I quite believe it. And then you said
That you would see her to-night.

F. Pray mind your business, Tristram:
Pay more attention to what is said to you,
And less to what is not. Whom would you speak
of?

T. I speak of no one, sir.

F. No more do I. 421
[*Exit.*]

T. My master's mad. If this is court life, I shall
soon curse my birthday, like dutiful Job. 'Tis a
mad-house. If there were any sense in anything
that's said or done, I'd swear my life that the Countess
was in love with my master, and he might
have her for the asking. Yet who can tell what she
means, when every one plays at being in love with
somebody? 'Tis a fashion with them as catching
as the measles. My constitution holds out, thank
heaven. (*Sings.*)

The meads drink up the rain,
The kine eat up the grass,
And man feeds on the kine,
And love on man, alas.
So about and about! fa, la!

And there's a good light step to that tune, which I
think I can do as well as any I have seen. (*Dances
and sings.*)

So about and about! fa, la!
So about and about! fa, la! etc.

Enter FLORA, who watches him awhile and then laughs aloud.

Fl. Ha! ha!

440

Well fancy, Tristram! dancing all alone!

T. Lack of company constrains a man to be alone; and as for dancing, 'tis the original sin Adam was born with. 'Twas seeing him dance alone provoked Providence to send him a partner. 'Tis now the inheritance of lambs and such innocents: and wert thou not too depraved by a court life, I would ask thee to dance with me.

Fl. I depraved! I will dance with you.

T. Canst thou?

450

Fl. Ha! ha! About and about, fa, la! (*Dancing.*)

(*They dance to each other and then together; in and out among the chairs.*)

O softly, Tristram, softly; I am out of breath.

T. You are not so depraved as I thought. Here's the coin I pay in. (*Kissing her.*)

Fl. I don't like you, Tristram. You take more liberties in a day than others would in a month.

T. Ah! ah! Oh wala! wala! (*Puts his finger to his head.*)

Fl. What is it? Are you giddy?

T. No, no. My constitution—my system.

Fl. What?

460

T. I'm going mad like the rest of them. I've caught it too.

Fl. Don't talk so; to frighten me, Tristram, like that. What do you mean?

T. Well, we shall make a better pair than two I know.

Fl. I never promised. And what would my lady say? And—oh! I forgot: she sent me to fetch you.

T. My lady?—me?

Fl. Yes, you.

470

T. She sent for me?

Fl. No sooner was she come in the house, than as she sat looking on the silks, one of her fits took her, and I thought she would faint: when suddenly she got up, and bade me go out and seek for you. See, here she comes.

T. What can she need with me? (*Aside.*) If she has got wind of me and Flora, it's all up.

Enter DIANA.

D. (*to Fl.*). I see you have found him, Flora. 480

Fl. We were coming, my lady, as fast as we could.

D. Leave us alone. [*Exit* FLORA.

Good Tristram; will you serve me?

T. Certainly, my lady. My lady has only to command.

D. But in a matter where your duty might seem opposed to my interest.

T. 'Tis impossible, my lady, that my duties could be opposed to my lady's.

D. I think, Tristram, that you know a secret which concerns me.

T. I assure your ladyship, upon my oath . . .

D. Stay now. Take this purse . . .

T. I thank your ladyship.

D. To convince you of my goodwill. Now I have a suspicion: and whether or no you help me to come at the truth, I shall learn it. I will not have secrets kept from me in my court.

T. Certainly not, my lady. But I pray your ladyship to speak plainly, for I am a simple man; and if I am to assist your ladyship, I must understand your ladyship.

502

D. You are a very sensible fellow, Tristram. Tell me then, do you not know of some one in the court, who carries on a love-affair behind my back?

T. (*aside*). It's me.—No, my lady: I do not. It is impossible that any one should do such a thing.

D. Is not your master in love?

T. Oh! . . . my master? Certainly; not a doubt of it.

D. So I thought. Now you must tell me, good Tristram, with whom he is in love.

T. If that's the question, my lady, you may take back the purse again. Take it; I thought it was not like my luck.

D. You will not tell?

T. I cannot tell what I do not know, my lady.

D. You do not know?

T. I have not an inclination.

519

D. Stay yet. You shall keep the purse if you will do your best to discover who she is.

T. Your ladyship is very fair (*pocketing*), and I thank your ladyship for restoring my confidence.

D. Then tell me first. You say you know that your master is in love.

T. Certainly; as much or more than all the court.

D. All the court!

T. Except your ladyship . . . I beg your ladyship's pardon.

530

D. Except me?

T. And me.

D. And you?

T. And old Sir Gregory, I may say.

D. Please, Tristram, keep to the matter. By what signs know you that your master is in love?

T. First because he talks nonsense aloud to himself; then he reads and writes so many letters.

D. Letters, you say!

539

T. Certainly. Why, the moment that you left, He pulled one out and read it to himself.
And now I am dead, he says, and now I live;
And all the rest of it.

D. I must know from whom
That letter came.

T. And that much I can tell.
I saw him write it to himself, last night,
And put it in his pocket. To my knowledge,
He has never sent it, and received no other,
Nor spoke to a lady since;—when, on a sudden,

He whips it out, and reads it to himself
 As if 'twere newly come. Then, off he goes, 550
 Bragging, 'tis an appointment for to-night.

D. To-night?

T. Ay, so he said. But he can't hide
 The truth from me. The fact is this, my lady;
 He makes believe. He sees that everybody
 Is full of this same love: since 'tis the fashion
 He'd be ashamed, just for the lack of a lady,
 To come behind. But all the love he makes
 Is to himself.

D. But if there were a lady,
 Think you she would be of the court?

T. Why certainly.

D. How so?

T. Because 'tis only in the court 560
 That such ridiculous foolery would pass.

D. Stay. If he loved a lady of the court,
 I think I must have known her.

T. Very true.
 Your ladyship is right. If 'twere a lady,
 She could not be of the court.

D. Then we must look
 To find her in the town.

T. 'Tis very plain,
 That if she is not in the court, she is in the town.

D. I have set you on the track. If you will serve
 me,

Discover who this lady is: observe
 Your master narrowly; above all to-night 570

Follow him where'er he goes, watch all he does;
And bring me word to-morrow. That's the service
For which, good Tristram, I will pay you well.
But can I trust you?

T. I never deceived any one, my lady: and if I
can discover my master's secret, your ladyship shall
know it. I hold, like your ladyship, that love is a
most contemptible disease, from which a good servant
should seek to deliver his master. But I don't think
we shall find any lady. 580

D. No lady, no pay, Tristram; remember that:
And, above all, be secret. Now, go your way,
And tell your master I wish to see him here.

T. I will, your ladyship. (*Aside.*) And as for
secrets—if you knew my master's as well as I know
yours, you would not need to take me into your pay.

[*Exit.*

D. To-night: they meet to-night. It may be now
That I am in time: maybe they have never met,
At least not thus. It seems they have carried on
The intrigue, so far, by letter, and now by letter 590
They have made their assignation for to-night.
At last I have found out something . . . it shall not
be . . .

Their first . . . no, no: that I can hinder . . .
I trust the clown: he could not frame a tale;
And what I gave him won him. Yet no guess
Who she should be. It tortures jealousy
To know so little: still where little is known
May little be. But Frederick doth not feign.

Nay if he feigned he would not hide it from me :
 And loved he not another, he would be 600
 More open to my meaning when I try him
 With such unveilings of my inclination
 As make me blush alone. O perverse love,
 At once triumphant and inscrutable,
 Palpable and impotent. What if he knows
 I love him, and yet loves me not, but loves
 Another, a rival? But if he knows not,
 And if he knew, might love—while there's that hope,
 They shall not meet: so much I can ensure.
 I must be cruel to thee, my unknown foe: 610
 Thou lookest to meet him, but he shall not come.
 I'll make him play thee false . . . what vantage else
 That he is my servant. I can send him off
 Whither I will. Against this assignation
 I'll make an alibi. My plan is ready:
 I'll send him away from Belflor. Here he comes,
 My enemy and my deity. If he quarrel
 With my command he is guilty; a word will show.

Enter FREDERICK, with some papers, ink, and pen.

F. Your ladyship sent for me.

D. What have you there?

F. Some papers for your ladyship to sign. 620

D. Set them down on the chair.

F. I have brought besides
 The settlement for Lady Laura's marriage.

D. Thank you: 'tis time I had it. I cannot now
 Attend to business. I have a message, Frederick,

To send to Milan: it demands despatch,
And you must bear it to-night.

F. To-night, my lady!

D. To-night. Why not to-night?

F. No reason at all.

Except . . .

D. Except what?

F. Since your ladyship

Well knows the full devotion which I lend

To her affairs, I fear not to incur

630

Blame of remissness, if I beg for once

To be excused this service.

D. (*aside*). Ah, he is hit.

F. I'd travel to the corners of the globe

To serve your ladyship: and in a journey

So light as this, one that would never burden

The most unwilling servant, I can beg

Without reproach that you will find for once

Another messenger.

D. What then prevents you?

F. Good cause enough; though 'tis not of a nature
To welcome question.

D. There's no person, Frederick,

That more regards your health, nor more regrets 640

Your slightest ailing than do I. I fear

You have done me wrong concealing from my knowl-
edge

The true state of your health . . . but if 'twas kind-
ness

To spare me anxiety . . .

F. I assure, my lady . . .

D. I have thought you looked of late careworn
and pale.

F. My health is excellent.

D. I am glad to hear it.

F. The expression of your goodwill reassures me
Your ladyship will humour me.

D. And I would

Most gladly, were it a matter that admitted
A bearer of less trust. But as it stands 650

There's nothing for it but your going to-night.
You are out of sorts, Frederick: maybe the travelling
Is just the change you need. Give me that pen,
I'll write the letter at once. (*F. gives and D. writes.*)

If you fear cold

You can close up the coach. The journey is short:
'Twill cheer you, and do you good.

F. (aside). Curse on my fate.

How can I escape? What devil hath now possessed
her

To thwart me thus? And after all my service

To insist: so small a matter.

D. (giving). Here is the letter.

Deliver it, please, with your own hand. Leave
here

At six o'clock to-night. Take Tristram with you.

'Twill make me more at ease on your behalf,

In case you are ill. (*Gathering up papers.*)

And whatsoe'er you do

Return by noon to-morrow: at which hour

I need the answer. You will oblige me much.
I wish you a pleasant journey.

[*Exit taking the papers.*]

F. Is that a blindfold player? Who is it to,
This letter? The Duke of Milan! Ha! can it
be!

Is that the mischief? He is discovered, and I
Suspected of complicity, and thus 670
She would expose us both?

Enter TRISTRAM.

We are both undone.

T. (half aside). Another letter! came this like the
last

Borne on the winds?

F. (aside). She hath recognized the Duke,
No doubt. 'Twas natural. But why suspect
That I am in his secret? Till I am sure,
I must still play my part.

T. (aside). Secrets again:
More mysteries.

F. (to T.). Order me horses, Tristram,
At six o'clock.

T. What! is she off?

F. Who off?

T. The lady you should meet to-night.

F. Plague on you!

A coach at six: and be yourself prepared 680
To accompany me.

T. Where go we?

Enter R.

F. To the devil.

Order the horses.

T. Is our destination

A secret?

F. No.

T. Then who will ride postilion?

F. Go, fool, at once. [*Exit T.*]

(*To R.*) Richard, you come in time:

You are recognized. See here! The Countess bids me
Deliver you this letter.

R. (taking). To me! Diana!

Why! 'tis addressed to Milan. 'Tis impossible.

Nay, nay; she knows not. What hath made you
think it?

F. Because she bade me post this night to Milan
To give this in your hands. I pleaded sickness, 690
Begged she would find some other messenger:
Yet she refused. She would trust none but me.

R. And why, man, if you thought I was suspected,
Did you refuse? Another messenger
Must have betrayed me.

F. True. I was a fool
Not to have thought of that. No, now I think of it,
I knew not whither I was to be sent
When I excused myself. The fact is, Richard,
I thought I was discovered, and lost my head.
Laura and I had fixed to meet to-night. 700
Our only hope is flight: misleading others,

She has fallen into a trap: she is bound to marry
That fool St. Nicholas. I must persuade her
To run away. Unless we meet, the moment
Of all our life is past.

R. I see it: I see it.—
And so she hath writ to me! Why should these
words,
Writ by her hand so set my heart adance?
Is it beautiful? Nay,—but 'tis my name that leads
Every direction of these little curves,
Which, by long intercourse of hand and brain, 710
Were specialized to typify and betray
The hiding spirit? There are such secrets here
As dazzle lovers' eyes. She will be mine.
She wrote me a letter once before in scorn,
With studied terms of coldness: yet to me
That seemed—I treasure it still—a lovers' meeting
Of our two names on the same conscious page,
A daring intimacy, her own betrothal.
Was I deceived boasting so crazed a title?
What saith she now?

F. Ha! do not break the seal. 720

R. Is it not mine?

F. She yet might ask it back:
And 'twould betray us if I had given it up.

R. Yes: you shall keep it till you start, and then
Give it to me. You must discover of course
That I am away from home, and leave the letter.
Will not that do?

F. This is my ruin, Richard:

It means that I must be away to-night;
And that prevents my meeting Laura; and that
Leaves the field to my rival.

Enter ST. NICHOLAS.

R. Hush! see, he comes.

N. That paper you are in doubt of, gentlemen, 730
Is, I opine, the poem which I have lost:—
You picked it up in the garden?—a private trifle
Which I'd recover gladly.

R. I am sorry, sir,
'Tis no such lofty matter. A letter it is
Sealed and addressed, which takes our friend away.
But I can say with truth, I'd rate myself
The happiest man in the world, could I believe
That what I hold was fashioned ever so little
In your romantic vein.

N. You make me proud, sir.
Yet, you should know, I do not think my poems 740
As good as others think them: they are but trifles.
I wish that I could stay to explain my meaning;
But I must seek my sonnet. [*Exit.*]

R. Your rival. O heavens!

F. A fool that fortune favours.

R. Not at all.

Diana hath here some purpose we have not guessed.
Come to my room: there we will read her letter;
And if it shew no sign of my discovery,

I'll write it such an answer as it asks;
Which, when you have, you may perform your service,
And see your mistress both. 'Tis but to start 750
At the set time, and turn about in the dark.

F. Make a pretended journey?

R. An expedition
Some ten miles out and back.

F. I'll do it, Richard.
O, you were ever excellent.

R. Arrange
Some practicable stages; and remember
To keep an eye on the time.

F. Trust me.

R. And, hark!
If some night you should make the real journey,
Would Laura fly with you?

F. Fly where?

R. I'll tell you.
I have planned the whole thing for you: I put my
palace

At your command; my servants shall receive you;
The archbishop marry you, and all my friends
Attend your fête.

F. You cannot mean it, Richard!

R. By heaven, I do: but you must first persuade
Your lady to make sail.

F. That would be easy,
With such a port to run for. But how soon?
It could not be to-night.

R. I need one day
To warn my people. Come now to my room,

Where we will read this letter. Our success
Depends on secrecy.

F. True.

R. Go within:

To avoid encounter I will follow alone. 770

F. To your room?

R. Yes.

F. Which suite are you in?

R. They call it

One of the Grecian muses.

F. Yes, but which?

R. I quite forget. At the end of the corridor,
Beyond the tower.

F. I know. You'll find me there. [*Exit.*

R. To get this Frederick married, more concerns
me

Than anything else. 'Tis plain Diana loves him:
And till he's gone, 'tis folly to besiege
Her garrisoned heart. I must engage my skill,
Like a wise general, to draw off the foe.

That I can do. 'Tis a most blessed chance 780
That he is so well disposed, and hath a lady
Ready to run off with him. The very thing
I plot to save myself, most helps my friend.

[*Exit.*

Enter TRISTRAM *with a paper.*

T. I have found a prize: just exactly what I
wanted: one of my master's love-letters, or a piece

of one,—that's the third to-day,—lying on the walk. It was not there when I went to order the horses, else I must have trod on it; but when I came back, it lay in the middle of the path, as if dropped from the skies. Reveal what it may, it goes to the Countess to-morrow; and it should stand me in something handsome. Unsealed, unfolded even, for any to read: and no name. Poetry like my master's. There's no harm in my reading, even though I should not understand.

(*Reads.*)—"Master of mine!"—Ha! 'tis the lady.

*"Master of mine, remember for pity,
What sobs of fluting lips, wan with dismay,"*

Poor thing!

*"And malison of death, my soulless clay
Panteth in thine unspeak'ble purgatory."*

Unspeak'ble!—that is unspeakable; and *purgatree!*—why the big O hath fallen out. I never loved this purgatory, and quarrel not at any shortening of it.—"*Enchained long whilom.*"—Mysteries and crimes! chained is she? Where can he have chained her? and how, if she be chained, can she have cast this on the path? unless she threw it from the window . . .

"Enchained long whilom, was I fain to flee."

Just so! But is she fled or no? I wish she wrote clearer sense.

(*Enter ST. NICHOLAS behind.*)

*"Enchained long whilom, was I fain to flee;
But thou, with wildered phantom disarray,
Nightly disguised in the blue garb of day,
Besetdst the sleep-gates of my melanch'ly."* 815

Hem!

N. (*coming forward*). Tristram, where found you that? it was not intended for your reading.

T. So I guess, sir; but if letters be purposely thrown open on the ground, they may be read by those for whom they were not intended.

N. Give it to me. 'Tis mine.

T. I see no sign of that, sir, unless you will say that everything which the ladies let fall belongs to you.

N. No impertinence, man: give it me at once.

T. Nay; I have my duty. This belongs to my master. I shall guard it for him.

N. I tell you 'tis mine.

T. So you said of Lady Laura's glove.

N. That has nothing to do with it. Give me the paper.

T. Not till 'tis proved to be yours, sir: which can never be.

N. I tell you, Tristram, that I wrote it myself.

T. We shall soon see that, sir. This is writ by a lady; who is prisoned or chained somewhere in the court. And she says;—well, what she says I cannot tell; but my master thinks she has run away, and has bade me order the horses to be after her.

N. What ridiculous stuff you make of it, Tristram. 'Tis addressed to Love: you do not understand.

T. Yes: it is love, and court love too: I understand that well enough, and I understand that 'tis writ to a man; therefore 'tis pikestaff-plain that 'tis writ by a woman: therefore it half follows that you did not write it: and therefore it belongs to my master.

N. How therefore belongs it to your master?

T. Why whose else should it be? His letters come from the four quarters, no one knows whither; just where this came from.

N. Nonsense, Tristram: I assure you 'tis mine.

T. Think not to owl me thus.

N. Man! I swear that I composed that poem myself. Had you any culture you would distinguish it from the poor style of a woman. It has fallen from my pocket by accident: and if you will not give it me, I must take it from you.

T. Hands off, sir, now. I can't think why you should try to get what belongs to another. You are mistaken. "Master of mine" it says—and would a man write thus? (*Begins to read.*)

N. Death! stop mine ears! That I should hear my verse
Again profaned by thee, thou baseborn clown.

T. I read correctly, sir. If you find fault with my reading, 'tis the strangeness of the matter. I have good reasons for not parting with this; and I am not a baseborn clown.

N. Worse; thou art a thief.

T. Thief call you me? Now were the verses ten thousand times yours, sir, I'd never give 'em you. I defy you!

N. Thou to defy me, slave; paid by the month
To render menial offices to one
Himself the annual hireling of the lady 875
Whom I shall call my sister! O thou fool,
If reason cannot work into thy skull
'Cause of its wooden thickness, I'll find means
To punish thee.

T. Good day, sir. Stand you here and rail. I must be off with my master after this lady. But I shall not forget your language to me, sir: be this paper what it will. [*Exit.*]

N. Tristram, Tristram, I beg of you! my sonnet! my sonnet!

ACT II.

SCENE I.

Night. The garden, at LAURA'S windows, which are nearly to the ground. L. a wall with door in it leading from the park without. Enter by door in travelling costume FREDERICK, and TRISTRAM carrying a small portmanteau. F. stays behind to lock the door.

T. (coming to front). Here's a journey: twenty miles about and home again: and no lady. Were it not for the letter I found on the path, I should hold to my opinion that it is all a make-believe, and that there is no lady at all: and that my master wrote that first letter to himself, making the appointment to meet himself, . . he returns so pleased, with his head in the air, like the best satisfied lover. I have a fool for my master. He is but a fool, tho' he needs no humouring. (*To F., who approaches.*) Well, now we are at home again, sir; and as it were partly returned to our senses . . .

F. Silence, Tristram. Take off your boots.

T. Pray, sir . . .

F. Not a word. Obey me.

900

T. Heaven help us! what is this for?

F. Silence. Are they off?

T. They are coming.

F. Hark now what you have to do. Cross the grass silently, unlock my door, creep up-stairs like a thief, and sit in my chamber without a movement till I come.

T. The grass is like a sponge. I have begun to catch cold already: I am just going to sneeze.

F. Sneeze, and I'll strangle you.

T. Is this your treatment for all my services?

F. Your service is your duty to obey:

And once you served me well: of late you are grown

Questionous and prying; which I have so far borne,
Because I have been in doubt whether it were best
To thrash you or discharge you.

T. And no wonder neither. Thus the world will repay devotion. Can I see you so blind to your good fortune, and when heaven's door stands open . . .

F. Heaven's door! what is this? 920

T. You do not know.

F. Say what you mean.

T. This court, wherein you serve and get no thanks,

You might rule and be thanked.

F. Just as I thought;

Ere I dismiss you I shall tell the Countess

Your insolence. The whipping you will get

Will save me trouble.

T. I pray you on my knees.

F. Get up, fool, lest you sneeze. And would you escape

Your rich deservings, be off.

T. Betray me not, sir: I will obey you better.

F. Silence: go do as I bid you. Begone, and take your boots. [*Exit T.*

So my man knows her secret. 'Tis high time
That Laura and I were off. This salves my conscience
From any scruple. 'Tis a rule of art
To make obstructions serve: and my chief hindrance,
Diana's passion, can but urge me on.
So the mischance, which drew me hence to-night,
Hath brought me hither a more secret way.
The night is still. I would there were a wind.
And there's the clock. (*Clock strikes.*) I'll wait
Till it hath sounded . . No light . . I'll tap. 941

(*Goes to window and taps. LAURA comes to window and opens.*)

F. All's well. 'Tis I.

L. Frederick, not gone to Milan?

F. I escaped but with a thousand torments—
May I come in?

L. We can talk here.

F. The night
Is very still, our voices will be heard:

They run along the wall.

L. Then I'll come out.

F. We shall be seen.

L. The maids are all abed.

There's none to see us; and the moon is clouded.
We'll walk by the yew hedge. Give me your hand.

F. 'Tis but one step.

L. I know. (*Comes down.*)

F. My kiss. (*Kisses her.*)

L. O Frederick, 950

You have broken your own rule, and kissed me thrice.

F. One kiss a day, with two days in arrear,
Makes three.

L. Alas! I thought 'twas love's excess,
And still I am kissed by rule.

F. And be content, love,
To keep the little rules we make ourselves,
Since thou must break such great ones; and canst dare
Deceive the Countess, disobey thy father,
And brave the world's opinion: all which sins
I come to stablish in thee. There's now no choice
But fly with me or take St. Nicholas. 960

L. That name is desperation. Have you no plan
To save me?

F. If you dare fly with me to Milan.

L. To-night?

F. Would 'twere to-night.

L. But when, love, when?

F. Trust me to find the time.

L. And why to Milan?

F. My friend the Duke, being now away from
home,
Lends me his palace. All we else should lack,
Appointment and conveyance, he supplies.

We have his countenance now, his influence after,
To appease your father and sister.

L. Are you such friends?

F. There cannot be two hearts in all the world
Nearer-familiar than are his and mine.

L. You never told me.

F. I had not heard from him
Now for three years.

L. 'Tis strange.

F. Nay, 'tis not strange.

Ours was a boyhood friendship; such affection
Born in life's spring is perfect with the flower.
The memory is a binding intimacy,
Which grows as we grow from it: in its strength
Is our lost tenderness; its truth is proved
By every lie the world has given our hopes:
Absence and age best feed it. We remember 980
First ecstasies, and the unreserved embrace
Of mutual spirits, and worship the remembrance.
The Duke and I are strangers in the world,
Courteous acquaintance in society,
But to ourselves, twin individual gods.

L. Alas, poor me!

F. Can it displease you, love,
I have such a friend?

L. Ere it is too late, Frederick,
Think if you love me enough.

F. Why, 'tis a question
To make me think you think I think I do not.

L. Indeed, ere I consent to be your wife . . . 990

F. You have consented, Laura.

L. Nay, but hear me.
Before we marry, you must know a thing,
Which, since it might lessen your love for me,
Shall not be kept till after.

F. Then tell it quickly.

L. What you have said, and what I have to tell,
So dwarfs my little humble plant of love.

F. Tell it.

L. Diana loves you.

F. You know it too!

L. You know it!

F. I!—Why, Laura, is this your secret!

L. I see you have guessed it; yet, perhaps, for
thinking

Thou shouldst be loyal where thy faith is cherished,
Thou hast never weighed her claim with mine; and
that

I'd have thee do. Look to thine interest:

For loving women differ not so much

But all may make good wives; and whatsoe'er

Thou thinkest to see in me, Frederick, I am sure

I lack all excellence. There's nothing in me

Why I should have preferment o'er another,

And least of all of her who can boast loveliness

To match her love; and add those other gifts,

Which are necessities to one like thee. 1010

Thou, with high friendships shouldst have power and
station,

And fitted for the fairest use of wealth,

Thou art wronged in the want of it: and, Love, I
love thee

So better than myself, that I would see thee
Happily another's rather than my own
With the reproach of selfishness, the knowledge
That thou wert sacrificed for my poor love.

F. If women differ little, what of men?

St. Nicholas loves you, and would give you rank.

L. Thou knowst thou wrongst me, Frederick,
turning thus

1020

My love of thee to banter of my love.

F. I only banter where you dare be grave.

L. Because thou knowest, Love, I desire not
wealth.

My happiness would be to live with thee
And for thee: but to thee what can I bring?
Think not because I wish thee fortunate,
That I forget my hope, or slight the treasure
So much desired of my loving soul.

F. And for that loving soul you bid me take
Some fifty thousand ducats by the year,
A major-domo, and a heap of things
That are a proverb for their emptiness!

1030

L. Diana's love, I said; that with the ducats.

F. Well, what doth all this come to when 'tis told?
First is Diana's love. Diana's love
Is nothing, for I do not love Diana.
Next are the ducats: fifty thousand ducats.
They are nothing either—by the year! Why, Laura,
Were't fifty thousand ducats by the day

'Twere nothing to me. You can little guess 1040
My prodigal soul. I should expend it all
And sit at home and be as poor as ever.

L. How could you spend so much?

F. Nothing is much.

Man's capabilities being infinite
And his state pitiful, the simplest scheme
For bettering any faculty he hath,
Would eat up all the money in the world.

L. But to use riches rightly—

F. I have no desire
That earth can satisfy, but one; and that
Shall I play false to?

L. Nay; I trust you well. 1050

F. Then waste no more the precious moments,
Laura,

To question the great blessing we enjoy.
Our hours will all be as this hour to-night;
Either to step with in eternity
Towards our perfection with unwavering will,
Or with a questioning purpose let it slide,
And leave us far behind. A man's desires
Are his companions and by them he is known;
But he himself is what he grows to be
Using his time.

L. How best to use it now?

F. First to assure thee, dearest, that all the joys
I have had or hoped are nothing to thy love.
And next, that we may make it sure, I ask thee
To say thou'lt fly with me.

L. When, Frederick, when?
I fear 'twill never be; we have but two days.

F. Therefore be ready at any moment, Laura.
All's fixed except the time: that must depend
Upon occasion. If I cannot see thee,
Ricardo, whom I have made my confidant,
Will bring thee word. He cannot be suspected, 1070
And thou mayst trust him.

L. Dare I tell my father?

F. That's my chief scruple; and yet we dare not
tell him.

If only Providence would give him back
His hearing for one day! After one day
Spent with St. Nicholas, I should not fear
To broach our matter.

L. He has the marriage contract
Ready to sign.

F. Not as he thinks. By luck
They entrusted it to me; and as I have drawn it
He cannot sign it. He must give it me back,
And that will make delay.

L. Of all these chances,
If any one go wrong . . .

F. All will go well.
See, here's my portrait, Laura, which I promised:
'Tis framed like yours; that is its only merit.

L. O, let me have it.

F. Take it. That you should care
To look upon it, makes me ashamed.

L. O, Frederick!

If you knew all my foolishness, I think
You would despise me. By this little light
I can see nothing. Is't well done?

F. So, so.

It flatters me: but that's the artist's trick.

L. Flatters you!

F. Well, it taints me with the fashion, 1090
Which is the vulgar dress of imitations,
And a less blunder than mere naked skill.
The individual ideals are given
To genius only.

L. I would have had you painted
Just as you are.

F. Nay.—Hark! I hear a step . . .

L. What can we do?

F. Some one is coming hither.

L. Where can we hide?

F. I cannot think; unless
You creep along the hedge. I'll wait and see
Who 'tis. I think it must be Tristram.

[*Exit* LAURA.]

Enter RICARDO.

R. Frederick!

F. Richard! what is the matter?

R. Forgive my coming:
But if you wish it thought that you are at Milan,
Your room should not be lighted, and your servant
Should not be singing.

F. Singing!—is Tristram singing?

R. Hark! You may hear. (*T's lute heard faintly.*)

F. By heaven!—the wretch! Tell Laura
Why I am gone. All will be lost. [*Exit.*

R. Indeed,
Unless Diana is sleeping very soundly,
The escapade's betrayed.

Re-enter LAURA.

My service, lady.

L. I heard you speak with Frederick, sir, and
thank you
For your kind offices.

R. I need no thanks.
I have a deeper interest in your welfare 1110
Than you can guess. I fear that fellow Tristram
May ruin us all.

L. Frederick hath told me, sir,
You know our secret, and will act between us;
For which I thank you. I bid you now good-
night:
I should go in.

R. As soon as possible.
Pray you be not observed. But first I beg you
Thank me for Frederick's visit.

L. You, sir! why?

R. Why, but for me he had been at Milan.

L. Ah!
I thank you very much.

R. He doth not scheme
Well for himself. He needs a wife.

L. Indeed 1120
I cannot scheme.

R. And 'tis the fairer wish
You neither may have ever need. Good-night.

L. Good-night, sir. [*Exit in at window.*

R. She's a good creature, quick and sensible;
She'll fly with Frederick. It provokes my soul
That that conceited inconsiderate loon
Should put us all in peril. I have half a mind
To take him in my pay.

Re-enter F. with a lute.

F. Is Laura gone?

R. And not too soon. If your fine musical man
Have waked the Countess she may have heard you
too.
He is silenced now, I hope.

F. Here's his curst lute: 1130
I took it from him.

R. Ha! then give it to me.
The very thing. I'll step into the gap,
And take the blame of this untimely singing
Upon myself. Go in and leave me here:
And if to-morrow any ask who 'twas
That played and sang at midnight—why 'twas I.
Go in.

F. Well, bravo, Richard: you're a genius.

R. Leave me.

F. I go. Good-night. [*Exit.*

R. Now must I sing.

And when there's none to hear I am sometimes
able
To please myself: else I must ask indulgence.

Sings.

My eyes for beauty pine,
My soul for Goddës grace:
No other hope nor care is mine;
To heaven I turn my face.

One splendour thence is shed
From all the stars above:
'Tis namèd when God's name is said,
'Tis love, 'tis heavenly love.

And every gentle heart,
That burns with true desire,
Is lit from eyes that mirror part
Of that celestial fire.

1150

N. (*heard entering unseen*). Very sweet!

R. (*aside*). Ha! have I an audience after all?

N. Ricardo, I believe.

R. St. Nicholas, is't not?

N. Your lute, sir, as Amphion drew the trees
Up by the roots, hath drawn me from my bed.

R. Would I could make the lyrical apology
With which, I doubt not, he replanted them.

N. Nay, no apology. And, to say truth,
'Twas not so much your music as my wish
To catch the singer brought me out. I thought

'Twas Frederick's servant. He should not forget it
If I should catch him breaking rules.

R. I hope
I break no rules.

N. You see you are very near
The ladies' windows.

R. True: of course I must be.

N. And serenading is among the offences
Punished with diet.

R. Being a stranger, sir,
I cannot be suspected of the knowledge
That might incriminate me. You, no doubt,
Are more familiar.

N. Yes, there is one window 1170
Which I should know: and as you chance to stand
Just underneath it, I will not dissemble
That when I saw you first I felt the pangs
Of maddening jealousy. To find 'twas you
Relieved me entirely.

R. Nay then, truly, sir,
I owe you apology: for if your mistress
Should have mistook my falala for yours,
The poor performance may have hurt your credit.

N. Nay, sir, I sing so seldom, I only fear
I cannot be suspected. If I might 1180
I'd ask you sing again. There's nought affects me
Like music in the moonlight.

R. I would oblige you
But for the rules you speak of. Were't not better
We should go in? 'tis midnight.

N. Oh, I could sit
And sigh beneath that window all the night.
Is there not wondrous softness in the thought,
That she one loves is sleeping?

R. I will leave you
To your love thoughts.

N. Nay, nay, no reason, sir.
I have full leisure for sweet meditation.
I will go in with you. 'Tis a rich comfort
To dream of the belovèd. [Exeunt.

SCENE II.

*On the terrace, in front of the house. Enter DIANA
and RICARDO. FLORA attending DIANA.*

D. What time is't, sir?

R. I heard the bells of the town
Strike ten but now.

D. Ah! you can hear the bells,
Because they are strange to you. I note them most
The days they miss . . And so 'tis only ten . . .
I hope you are comfortable here, Ricardo:
Gregory took care of you? The clocks for example
Did not disturb your rest?

R. Your ladyship
Means to reproach me with late hours: but if
I had thought my singing could be heard . . . 1200

D. Your singing?

How musical the world is now-a-days—
Yet I heard not your singing.

R. I am very glad:
I feared I had offended. For myself
I can assure you that though some things here
Remind me of Milan, where the Duke . . .

D. Remember,
Speak not to me of Milan.

R. A thousand pardons,
I am schooled to hide my thoughts, and shall obey:
Tho' in your sight they wander to the Duke,
Who for that grace in such sad sickness pines.
A lord so loving, and so fair a lady,
Would she be also kind,—would make their courtiers
As envied as themselves.

D. Enough, forget him.
But say you that he is really sick, Ricardo?

R. Hopelessly he languishes. I do not think
He is long for this world.

D. So consumed with folly!
R. I too thought that his love was folly, lady,
Till I came here: but now I know he is wise.

D. I half suspect he sent you here to try me
With soft insinuations.

R. 'Twere his wish
I do not doubt: although he spake no word 1220
That I could wrest to such instruction, madam.

D. You serve him well.

R. May all your servants ever
Love you as I do him. Yet that's too much.

D. 'Tis all too much. But I can truly boast
I have very faithful servants. There's Sir Gregory:

I think you could not better him at Milan.
What say you?

R. Sir Gregory is the very mirror
Of knightly reverence.

D. He is sadly deaf.
Then there's my secretary.

R. Your secretary?

D. Frederick.

R. Ah, Frederick: on so short acquaintance
How can I judge?

D. You have a faculty 1231
Of observation, which I am pleased to prove;
Besides, since you are a stranger,—as you note
Our clocks,—your eyes, no doubt, while yet they are
fresh,

Will pounce upon a thousand little things,
Which we are blind to, seeing every day.
Tell me your first impression.

R. Your ladyship
Would never task me thus, but in security
Of finding perfect praise. I'll rather think
You ask me my opinion, as do poets,
To judge of my capacity.

D. Nay, nay. Nor will
I force your flattery. Speak your mind.
I hold him not in wondrous estimation.
What of his person?

R. He has a good deportment,
Yet stoops a little.

D. You have a soldier's eye.
He is tall, and hath the scholar's negligence.
A martial stiffness were much out of place.

R. True: and his open grace seems less a manner
Than very nature; being itself unlinked
With any distant bearing.

D. Now you teach me. 1250
You might have known him long to hit him so.
Have you talked with him much?

R. Enough to prove him
A most ingenious gentleman.

D. Ah!—ingenious!
Ingenious;—that is a doubtful word.
You do not mean contriving?

Enter F. and T. in their travelling costume as before.

R. See, madam: 'tis he that comes.
(*Aside.*) Her love is but a fancy; else would she
never

Provoke discussion on him, and seek to praise him.—

D. Frederick: returned so soon!—miraculous.
Such expedition. Thou canst scarce have rested.
'Tis two hours ere thy time.

F. 'Twas my good-fortune 1260
To meet no hindrance.

D. But thy health, good servant;
Thy sickness?

F. Madam, let my quick despatch

Bury my late reluctance. I confess
I was unreasonable. Indeed, the journey
Hath quite restored my spirits.

D. Yes, so it seems.

I hoped that it might be so. Hast thou my answer?

F. 'Tis here. (*Handing letter.*)

D. Thou must have roused the Duke from sleep.

F. 'Twas such an hour as one might look to find
A duke a-bed.

D. And he was not? Pray, tell us
Exactly how he was employed.

F. I chanced
To find him banqueting in merry company;
Such as make war on night, and march their force
Across the frontier, for a long campaign
In the enemy's country.

D. (*to R.*). Banqueting, you hear.
And at that hour.

F. All night they kept it up.

D. (*to R.*). Hark you.

R. I hear and wonder. (*To F.*) Say you, sir,
The Duke was merry, that he held a feast
Within the palace?

F. (*aside*). Heavens!—how I have blundered!
Nay, sir, I said not so: I said expressly,
Or should have said, he was another's guest. 1280

R. And yet I have never known him . . .

F. Indeed 'tis true:
He said to me himself those very words.
I have never known myself do this, he said.

T. (aside). Now, they are at their fooling again, and not a single word of any sense. 'Tis enough to drive a man mad with bewilderment.

R. (to D.). To plunge into distraction so unwonted
Argues despair. Grave men use dissipation
To drown their misery.

D. No doubt: and yet
Answer not for him.

F. True it is, my lady,
He did confess as much to me a stranger.
Despair;—that was his word. He seemed, withal,
Wondrously put out at all I chanced to say:
And very sick he looked.

T. (aside). Madness and lies! I'll hear no more
of this. (*Goes aside to FLORA.*)

D. It seems that dissipation
Agrees not with grave men.

R. Heaven smite me dead
If I protest not 'gainst the wrong you do him.

D. So hot!—Well, thrash this out between your-
selves:

'Tis nought to me. And, Frederick, when you have
dressed,

Rested, and breakfasted, attend me here. 1300

I thank you for your service.

F. You are welcome, madam,
To all such offices. (*Going.*)

D. Please leave your servant.

I have some papers ready indoors to send you.

F. I thank you. [*Exit.*]

R. I crave permission: I would follow
To ask of my particular affairs;
How they are spoke of whence he comes.

D. (*bowing permission*). I hope
You will hear good.

R. (*aside, going*). My Frederick needs fresh
prompting.
He is so preoccupied in his own love,
That I am forgotten. [*Exit*.

DIANA *opens the letter*.

T. (*to Fl., showing and shaking purse*). Look
here! Listen here!

Fl. What have you there?

T. Money,—ducats: all ducats.

D. (*reading aloud*). "*I could not have chosen,
among all my friends, one more discreet and serviceable
than is Ricardo. There is nothing so difficult that he
has not experience for it . . . nothing so private but
that he may not well be trusted with it . . . He has
been accustomed to manage all my affairs.*"

Fl. (*to T.*). But where did you get them, Tristram?

T. Ah! She gave them me.

Fl. The Countess! What for? 1320

T. Secrets: and there's more where they came
from.

Fl. More secrets, or more ducats?

T. Both,—plenty of both.

Fl. How nice for us.

T. Us! Who d'you mean by us?

Fl. I mean when we are married, Tristram.

T. Married, say you, now? I thought you had not promised. When I had no money you hung off. Now you see me as rich as Plutarch, you're quick enough. But it's a hoax. I filled this bag with curtain-rings to deceive you: and where are you now?

Fl. O, Tristram, let me see.

D. Tristram!

T. Your ladyship!

D. I'll speak with you.
Flora, depart. [*Exit* FLORA.

Now, Tristram, tell me shortly,
What you have learned.

T. I have found a letter, madam,
Writ by the lady. (*Fumbles for it.*)

D. Indeed!—that is good news. 1341
Nothing could please me better. In so short time
This is done excellently. Who is she, Tristram?

T. I think she is chained up somewhere in the
court.

D. Chained in the court! What mean you?

T. Here 'tis, my lady:
Read for yourself. (*Giving.*)

D. Why this is poetry;
And in St. Nicholas' hand.

T. I hope and trust
Your ladyship will not take his part.

D. His part!
What does this mean?

T. I picked that up in the garden:

St. Nicholas found me with it, and said 'twas his.
 I stood by it firmly 'twas the lady's piece, 1350
 And written to my master. He called me a thief;
 And if your ladyship . . .

D. Stay, Tristram, stay.

This paper is nothing: take it, and right yourself,
 As best you are able, with St. Nicholas . . .
 Tell me now all that happened on the journey
 I sent you last night with your master.

T. Your ladyship

Sent him?

D. Of course. I sent you both to Milan.
 When did you arrive there?

T. At Milan! Is't possible

Your ladyship should think I have been to Milan?

D. Not been to Milan?

T. Me!

D. You accompanied 1360

Your master?

T. I did.

D. (*holding R.'s letter*). And he has been to Milan.

T. It's true, your ladyship, I understand
 Nothing my master says, and very little
 Of what you say to him: and if you say
 He 'as been to Milan, I'll not meddle with it.
 But if you say that I have been to Milan,
 I am very much deceived. I do not like
 That any man should think such things of me;
 That I can go and not go, and be here
 And there at once.

D. Stay, Tristram; tell me plainly
All that your master has done since yesterday.

T. Well, first I found him with another letter,
All sighs and groans: then suddenly he bade me
Order the horses, and prepare myself
To drive with him to the devil at six o'clock.
At six we started on the Milan road
And came by dark to Asti; there we changed
Both horses and potillions and drove on:
And after three hours' jolting, when I guessed
We should be nearing Milan, the coach stopped 1380
In a ferny glade, and we got out; and then
I saw we were at Belflor, and the trees
Were in your ladyship's park.

D. Ah! Then what did he?

T. Came in and locked the gate of the park behind us,
And sent me on to his room, and bade me wait
Till he should come.

D. What hour was that?

T. Eleven.

D. (*aside*). The hour, no doubt, when he should meet his mistress—

When came he in?

T. By midnight.

D. He locked the gate . . .

The lady is in the palace.

T. So he pretends.

D. He let slip nothing on the journey?

T. He lit

A pocket lamp, and sat, mute as a fish,
 Counting the minutes on his watch; and then,
 As if it served as well to tell the time,
 He fetched the jewelled portrait from his breast,
 And gazed on that.

D. A portrait?

T. Certainly.

D. Carries he a portrait, say you?

T. Certainly.

D. You know not who 'tis of?

T. Not I, my lady.

D. Could you get sight of it?

T. Impossible.

At night 'tis neath his pillow, and all the day
 He keeps it in a little special pocket 1460
 In his doublet here, just under his heart; or if
 He pulls it out, he holds it by his chin
 Where none may see.

D. You should have told me of this,
 This portrait: have you no guess who 'tis of?

T. I guess 'tis part of the pretence, my lady;
 For when the fit is on he'll talk to it:
 And once I saw him kiss it.

D. Thank you, Tristram.
 Take now these papers to your master at once
 And tell him . . .

T. (going). I will, your ladyship.

D. Stay yet . . .
 This letter which he brought me, did you see 1470
 Whence he procured it?

T. I suppose, my lady,
He wrote it himself, no doubt of it. Where else
Should he have got it?

D. Tell Ricardo, Tristram,
I wish to see him here, at once. Your master
May wait on me at noon.

T. About that gentleman . . .

D. Begone, and do my bidding. [*Exit T.*
They have met in spite of me—they have met: and he
Hath dared to disobey me and lie to my face.
Who can it be? who is she? she is in my house . . .
Ah! what a prey I have netted! One of my
maids . . .

One of my maids, it must be . . O detestation!
And he hath her portrait. Ah, he loves, he loves.
The love that taught me to dissemble and scheme
Hath taught him to meet plot with counterplot.—
Frederick, dear Frederick! 'tis unworthy of you:
This is too hard upon me . . I loved you well.
Shame, shame, shame, shame! Indeed he cannot
know

How much I love him . . he cannot. Am I too old
At twenty-seven? out-matched! I had taken too
This letter for the Duke's. Ho! the insolence
To assume his fulsomeness! to forge in terms
Of a humble obedient lover, so he might
Keep tryst with . . O shame, shame! and then to
write it

He must have broke my seal, and read my letter—
He has gone too far: here is a slip in honour

Which I may work on. I'll not give him up,
 Not yet. He can be shamed: and first I'll prove
 The forgery, and then wring confession from him.
 'Tis well I have at hand so trusty a witness.

Enter RICARDO.

R. Your ladyship sent for me.

D. I did, Ricardo. 1440

In answer to the favour, which most gladly
 I do you at the Duke's request, I beg
 A service for myself.

R. My honoured master
 Commands me, lady; and you command my master.
 I am twice yours.

D. Again! well—Look at this!
 Is this your famous master's writing? Look.
 You know it? (*Giving letter.*)

R. As my own.

D. Is that then his?

R. It is,

And writ his best.

D. Why, 'tis a forgery,
 And you are deceived.

R. Nay, 'tis no forgery.

D. You are certain?

R. Certain.

D. You may read it through,
 Though 'tis about yourself. Examine it well, 1451
 If 'tis authentic. You will only find
 Prodigious praise to make you blush.

R. (*aside*). No wonder
If I do blush, faced with my own device.
(*Aloud, giving back.*) I'll strive to make this good.

D. And 'tis his hand?

R. It is.

D. I am glad, because it came as answer
To a letter I wrote but yesterday, and gave
To Frederick, ordering him to ride to Milan
And give it the Duke. This morning, as you saw,
He hands me this. His servant who was with
him

Tells me that he has not been to Milan at all,
But slept in the court.

R. (*aside*). Pest on that sneaking dolt!

D. What say you now?

R. May he not have used some other messenger?
I had my doubts when he brought in his tale,
That history of the banquet.—Did I not say
The Duke was wronged?

D. True, true; and tho' I am glad
He is quit of forgery, he is not of lying.
What can I think?

R. I thought your ladyship 1469
Trusted in Frederick wholly. When this morning
You praised him to me . . .

D. Praised him! stay, I beg:
I praised him not, save to draw words from you.
And you described him well; did not you say
He was contriving?

R. Then you trust him not?

D. See how he acts. Ah, if I told you all!
And yet to tell argues much confidence . . .

(*R. is silent and D. continues.*)

I have strange sympathies, affinities,
Magnetic or electric it may be,
Which rule my trust and liking: if all feel them
I cannot say: in me they are intimations
Of supernatural efficacy: I find
My first impressions never prompt me wrong.
Some men I see only to avoid,—You know
A strong example of that;—on the other hand
There are some faces,—eyes, I think,—that draw me
At first encounter; so that I often fancy
There must be a subtle emanation thrown
By the spirit, as light from fire. Now yesterday
When I saw you, I felt the secret shock
Which told me I was in presence of a soul 1490
In harmony with mine, one I could trust,
If I should need a friend: and when I wrote
To the Duke, it was not that my judgment wanted
The assurance which his letter gives. I knew
How it would be.—I hardly think, Ricardo,
That, had I asked for his own character,
Your master could have writ more praise.

R. I wish
To please my lady, as I have pleased the Duke.
I have kept his secrets.

D. I shall tell you mine.
Frederick hath had for some time an intrigue 1500

With a lady—you understand—a liberty
 I never have allowed, nor will: besides
 In him 'tis most intolerable . . .
 Now yesterday it chanced I came to learn
 He had made appointment with this certain person
 To meet by night: I know not who she is;
 But, wishing to prevent it, I contrived
 To send him on my message to the Duke;
 With what result you have heard.

R. The Duke, my lady,
 Is the only gainer here.

D. And are not you? 1510

R. Yes, I too, if I am raised in your esteem.

D. Then you must help me.

R. I can truly vouch
 Your ladyship has read my heart and soul.
 I feel heaven-drawn to serve you to the death.
 What is't to do?

D. Only seek out this matter
 For me; discover who this lady is.
 For private reasons I feel justified
 In using any means to learn the truth
 Dishonestly held from me by my servant:
 And so I have questioned Tristram. He assures
 me

They met last night: but he is profoundly dull,
 And not in Frederick's confidence.

R. Has he no notion
 How Frederick got this letter?

D. No.

R. Nor a hint
Of this mysterious lady?

D. He cannot help you.

R. Your ladyship must have a near suspicion.

D. Only a suspicion that's unfit to tell.

Enter LAURA.

Here is my sister, whom I wish to question.
Come to me soon again; I have meanwhile
Myself a stroke to play. When we next meet
I may know more.

R. Your most devoted servant. 1530
[*Exit.*

D. Good morning, dearest Laura.

L. Good morning, sister.

D. Did you sleep well last night?

L. I slept till nine.

D. What hour went you to bed?

L. Not very late . . .

D. Nay: but what hour?—before eleven?

L. (*aside*). What's this?

Are we discovered?

D. Was it before eleven?

L. I cannot tell. Why do you ask, Diana?
What is it has happened?

D. Answer me, I beg,
And you shall know. About that hour of the night
Did you hear any noise?

L. (*aside*). Ricardo's singing.—
What kind of noise?

D. Why, any noise, between 1540
Eleven and midnight.

L. Did you hear a noise?

D. No: but did you?

L. O no: I heard no noise.
What made you think there was a noise?

D. I have reason.

L. Was there a robbery?

D. Nay: no robbery.

And yet there was, Laura, a robbery:
Of honour,—our honour,—of woman's honour.
Laura, thou knowest the sacredness of love:
Love is the one thing in the world which women
Must guard from profanation; for by love
They rule; and if they trifle with their power, 1550
They come to be men's chattels, not their queens.
Thou'lt soon be married, Laura, and I can talk
Freely of these things: I have taught thee the relig-
ious

And philosophic doctrines; but to-day
We deal with facts. And first, then, I rejoice
Thy husband will be a man whom thou wilt rule,
One who adores thee reverently, who holds
Of love, as I, and with some special fancy:—
He is quite a poet.—Why, now, shouldst thou
smile?

Thou hast no taste in poetry, but suppose
St. Nicholas had lacked that inner sight,
Had fancied thee merely because he thought thee
A fine girl, and had used the common tricks

Of odious trifling, till he dared to kiss thee,
And meet thee alone, and put his arm about
thee . . .

L. Good heavens, Diana! I hope you do not think
He has ever done so.

D. No: of course he wouldn't.
But 'tis a fact men do such things; and that
Not with one woman only. And 'tis true
That there are ladies who admit the addresses 1570
Of more than one man.

L. O Diana!

D. Indeed,
'Tis true: and women are to blame if men
Make them their sport. Thou'rt shocked: but 'tis a
fact

That this detested pestilence invades
Earth's every nook: my palace doors and bolts,
My strong precautions, my well-known regard
For strictness, my injunctions, my example,
Cannot expel it.

L. Pray, Diana, tell me
What it is: you frighten me. Was any caught
Breaking the rules, or is it but suspicion?

D. Of the two criminals, the man I know,
The woman I know not; but if I knew her,
I am in the mood to kill her.

L. (*aside*). Thank heaven, she does not guess me—
Who is the man?

D. Better not ask; it matters not to thee:
But thou canst help me find this erring Eve.

If thou'st observed in any one of the maids
 Conscious behaviour, scrupulous regard
 To petty adornment, or, what most betrays,
 An inconsiderate blushing . . .

L. (aside). The maids, she says! 1590
 One of the maids! Good heavens!—

D. Marcela:
 Could it be she? She is handsome.

L. 'Tis not she:
 She tells me all her secrets.

D. Dorothy?

L. I do not think it.

D. Katharine?

L. No, not Kate.

D. I'll find the traitress out.

L. (aside). To save myself

I had best fall in with this.

D. What do you say?

L. I have not a suspicion,—but . . .

D. But what?

What?

L. If there's any one who might be charged
 With levity . . .

D. Who is it?

L. You'll not be angry,
 Diana?

D. Nay: but tell me.

L. I should say, 1600
 If there's one frivolous, and more than others
 Unapt to profit by the rules . . .

D. 'Tis who?

L. I think 'tis your own maid.

D. Flora?—pooh! pooh!

Flora's almost a hoyden.

L. (aside). How stupid of me!

D. They meet at night, Laura: unless he dares
To pass my chamber-door, 'tis in the garden.
Your window looks that way. I thought last night
You might have heard them.

L. Why, it's very unlikely
I should hear through the window.

D. Still, your window
Gives you an opportunity to watch. 1610
You could step out and hide in the garden.

L. Alone?

D. I would not ask my sister to play spy,
If it were possible that any scandal
Dared with its spotted finger point at her.

L. But who is the man, Diana?

D. If I tell,—
And you must know,—promise you will not breathe
it.

L. You need not ask.

D. 'Tis Frederick.

L. Frederick!

Incredible!

D. No, 'tis not incredible.
Nothing is incredible of any man.
And, Laura, I know that he is in love. He carries
A portrait of his lady in his pocket.

L. (*aside*). Ah!

D. I'll make an effort first to get at that.
But if I fail, I must ask you to watch
To-night, just for one night, only one hour.
You are trembling, Laura.

L. So are you, Diana.

D. I am angry.

L. So am I.

D. No: you are frightened.
Dare you not watch the garden?

L. O yes: I promise
I'll watch the garden well to-night, Diana.
If he should venture again, I'll see him. I think
I could wait longer than one hour.

D. Do so: 1630
I shall set guard within. Eleven's the time.

L. (*aside*). Could kindest ingenuity contrive
Better than this? But how shall I warn Frederick
About the picture?—

Enter SIR GREGORY and ST. NICHOLAS.

D. Good-morning, gentlemen. I need not ask
The reason why you visit me thus early.

N. Early is late to them that find their sunrise
In seeing thee, my lady.

D. Better speak, sir,
Your poetry to Laura.

N. She is my rose,
The rose of my sun's garden-round, and I 1640
The nightingale forlorn that steal to woo her.

D. That's very well. But I now, by my name,
Should be your moon.

N. I have a verse to fit. (*Reciting.*)

The flowers of dawn are uplifted to hear
The birds' enamoured tune,
Which tell their love in the pale ear
Of the far-flying moon.

D. That's very beautiful. Now, tell your love:
I fly. (*Goes to SIR GREGORY.*)

Sir Gregory, sit you to the table:
These are the articles. (*They sit, D. shows papers.*)

G. I much regret
The small provision that I make for Laura.
But if St. Nicholas doth as he has promised,
That will suffice. I see the treaty lacks
Nought but the seals.

D. He will make Laura rich.

G. My elder brother, as your ladyship knows,
Is childless, and next heir to such estates,
As fairly promise Laura twenty times
As much as what St. Nicholas gives her now.
Meanwhile we must not reckon on this chance.

D. Read it, Sir Gregory.

1660

L. (to *N.*). The day is fixed, and there my father
sits

Reading the settlement: what would you more?

N. O Laura,
More gracious words. Who that now heard us talk

Would guess we were to marry in two days?

L. Maybe we are not.

N. Nay, dear one, do not doubt me:
Have I not sworn my faith a thousand times?
And were I an emperor . . .

L. Who wants emperors?

N. Or even a prince.

L. I do not care for princes.

G. (aloud). Heigh! heigh! Why this will never
do. What's this?

N. But what can now prevent our marriage,
Laura?

L. Human affairs are ever so uncertain,—
And one of us might die,—and if 'twas you,
Think how much needless sorrow I then should suffer
For having loved you now. And, seeing the risk,
'Twere scarcely prudent to commit myself 1676
More than is necessary.

N. O cruel wisdom!
Are women all so careful of their feelings?

G. Why, what a blundering fellow!

D. What is't, Sir Gregory?

G. Heigh!

N. But when we are married thou wilt love me,
Laura?

L. Yes, when we are married.

N. I can wait for that:
'Tis but two days;—and now we speak of it,
I wish that thou wouldst tell me in what colour
'Twould please thee that I dressed. Or wilt thou
come,

O'erlook the suits my tailor has prepared,
And say which pleases best.

L. Sir, since you strike
The very root of the chord, I'll tell you how
You may best please me. There was once a man
I liked, whose custom it was to dress in black:
If you will dress like him . . .

N. In black!

G. (*LAURA listens.*) Your ladyship, 1690
I cannot sign this contract—the provision
I look for is not here; the scribe has blundered.
This is no settlement at all. Who drew it?

D. Frederick.

G. Then he's no lawyer. I am surprised
He took this on himself.

L. (*aside.*) So, well done, Frederick!

D. 'Tis most provoking. Are you sure, Sir Gregory,
'Tis as you say?

N. (*to Gregory.*) Will you not sign the contract?

G. (*rising.*) I cannot sign it.

D. There's a flaw, it seems,
In the deed, St. Nicholas: but there's time enough
To have it drawn afresh. Pray come, Sir Gregory,
Come to my study. Here we interrupt
These lovers. [*Beckons G. off. Exeunt D. and G.*]

N. Now they are gone, put off this mask.

L. What mask?

N. Thou dost respect the Countess' eye and ear,
And wilt not love when she is by: but now
Give me at least thy hand to kiss.

L. Why no, sir.

N. Say then thou lovest me, sweetest Laura. —

L. Nay, but I do not, sir. I understand
That women love their husbands, and I promise
To love mine when I am married; yes, as well 1710
As any happy woman on this earth
Hath ever loved. Are you content with that?

N. I should be, Laura; but thou dost not speak
As if 'twere true. I could see well enough
Thou wert not sorry when Sir Gregory said
He would not sign. I know thou wilt not love me.

L. Then why, in heaven's name, would you marry
me?

N. Because I love thee. But I think no man
Did ever love so cruel and strange a mistress.

L. And you, sir, do no less appear to me
Distrustful and impatient. Prithee go,
Busy yourself to get your clothes in fashion:
In two days is my marriage; after that—

N. Well!

L. After that all shall seem different.

N. I made a sonnet of my love for thee,
And would have given it.

L. Why then did you not?

N. I lost it in the garden.

L. It can't be lost.

N. No. Tristram found it and won't give it up.
He says that Frederick wrote it.

L. Frederick! nonsense, sir!
Some one is coming. Excuse me. [*Exit.* 1730]

N. O woman, various woman! thus to treat
The man she loves! and yet how well becomes
thee
Thy native wit, when sweetest modesty
Is masked thereby in tart indifference,
Which spurs far more than doting tenderness
The passion it rebuffs. What wit she hath!
My Laura! Wit is admirable in woman,
It is so rare; and 'tis the salt of marriage.

F. and R. have entered.

R. (to F.). Here's our belated bee, let's go elsewhere.

F. Nay, drive him to his hole.

R. How now, St. Nicholas!
Musing, I think, on thy good fortune, eh?

N. Good morning, Frederick, and, sir, how do you?

R. Fairly, I thank thee, fairly: but in presence
Of happiness like thine, mine goes for nothing.

F. Thou hast been honey-gathering early, sir.

N. I will confess it: that was my pursuit.

F. True to thy beeship, thy belated beeship.

N. Sir!

R. I am sure our friend means no offence.
The happy expressions of true genius
Stick in the memory.

F. Yes, sir, it stuck fast. 1750

The Sphinx's tear was somewhat sticky too.
Thou didst not spare us; we were put to shame.

N. Is that a reason, sir, before this stranger
To mock me? I can appreciate ridicule
Prompted by envy at its proper worth.
Affecting to find fault with my expressions!
Good morning, gentlemen. [*Exit.*

R. You poets treat each other vilely.

F. Now, Richard.

R. My scheme is this: I have written to my ser-
vants;
They will receive you. Leave to-morrow night,
And you will find all ready: You shall have
Such a reception and fair bridal trim,
And high festivities as shall dress out
The hasty manner of your coming.

F. But first,
How shall I make my escape? I am watched, sus-
pected.

R. I can arrange that too. By my behaviour
And letter to the Countess I have contrived
To win her trust. First I shall praise her scheme
Of sending you to Milan, and then persuade her
To send you again. You must hit on a plan 1770
How to convey your lady to the carriage,
And all is done.

F. What shall I do with Tristram?

R. Leave him to me: my purse will settle
him.

F. 'Tis excellently schemed; but if Diana

Press me to tell how I obtained the letter,
What can I say?

R. She is easily put off:
That question does not touch her. Any tale
Will serve.

F. Yet, Richard, what so generously
You do for me must ruin you with her.
Is't possible you are cured!

R. No, no: mistake not!
I am more and more in love: and see my way
By certain steps: and first to get thee married.
Her love for thee is a romance, which I
Can shift upon myself when thou art gone.
And that she loves thee, thee the worthiest,
Dearest and nearest of my earliest friends
Is no impediment. Is't not half way
To loving me? 'Tis happy for me, Frederick,
Thou hast not seen her worth.

F. And I half question
Whether 'tis not my duty as friend of both 1790
To close with her and save you.

R. Thou dost not know her,
Because, I thank thee for it, thou dost not love her.
And, friend, thy speech is gross; why, the truth is
There's not a man or woman on God's earth
However humble, mean, or ill-appearing,
That hath not in his sight some grace and favour,
Which angels see: but mortals overlook it,
Being spiritually blind: for which affliction
They have suffered half their shames, and slain the just.

But Love, God's gift, is spiritual sight;
'Tis the perception, which man lacks of all,
Given him of one, to see as angels see.
This is man's marriage: and what now I love
Is not, friend, what thou seest,—though thou mayst
see

A beauty unparalleled,—but rather that
Which by love's gift I see: so say no more.

F. Forgive me, Richard: 'tis a just rebuke.
I did speak grossly. 'Tis that artist's pride
Of which you used to warn me: I will confess it.
In my own case I am idealist 1810
At the price of all the world. If I believed
I were as others, I should mock myself.
I have not yet come to that. Now, in my excuse,
Diana is sometimes laughable.

R. And who
Would not be laughable who had his way,
Or if one set his humours on a throne?

F. Well, you will rule her. Still there's room to
fear
You may not win her.

R. I doubt not to win:
At least if you'll be gone.

F. Trust me to go.

Enter DIANA *with papers in hand.* LAURA *and*
FLORA.

D. Frederick!

F. Your ladyship!

D. This settlement
Is but waste paper. Didst thou draw it thyself?

F. I did, your ladyship.

D. Then pray explain.

F. If I have made any error . . .

D. Error, sir!
The lady is here left wholly unprovided.
And if Sir Gregory had not by good fortune
Studied the terms, but trusted to thy skill,
He had left his daughter penniless.

F. There is full time
To draw it afresh. I humbly crave your pardon
For such omission.

D. Stay, I have more against thee.
I will proceed in form. We have an audience: 1830
Stand upon thy defence. I am the plaintiff,
The accuser; and, Ricardo, be thou judge.
Hear all. This gentleman hath been my secretary
Now for twelve months. In all my affairs I have
set

No limit to my trust: I have ever shown him
Absolute confidence: and yet how think you
Hath he repaid me? He hath lied to me.
I accuse him here to his face before you all.
He said to-day he had been last night to Milan
And brought me a letter, when he had never been there,
And had not brought it. Contradict me, sir,
If I say wrong. You hear he is silent. Now
I say he forged that letter.

F. Silence, my lady,

Is the answer fittest for a charge too gross
To be denied.

D. Then tell me by what means
The letter came to thee. Still silent. I hope
Thou dost mark that, Ricardo.

F. In my defence
I say I have served your ladyship as well
As you have trusted me: and for this matter,—
You gave me a letter for the Duke of Milan 1850
Requiring speedy answer. I procured
That answer in good time.

D. Ah, but thou saidst
That thou thyself didst bear it, as I bade thee.
Silent? Now here's a secret; there's some matter
Withheld from me which I have a right to know.
I have cause to think thou hast upon thy person
The explanation. I would see what papers
Thou carriest with thee.

F. I have no papers, madam,
Such as you look to find.

D. Thou sayst that letter
Was not a forgery. I wish to see
If something which I think is in thy pocket
Is not a forgery.

F. If on first appearance
Of having wronged you, you mistrust me thus,
There is no cure. Demand my papers from me:
I cannot take them back.

D. I do demand them.

F. You shall have everything in perfect order
Before this evening.

D. Stay! I wish to see
What papers thou hast with thee.

F. Very well.
This is the only pocket in my dress;
Here the contents. (*Offers a few letters.*)

D. Is that the only pocket? 1870
I thought there was another little pocket
On the left side.

F. (aside). Ah! 'tis that villain Tristram
Hath told her this.

D. What say you, sir? Is't true?
No answer. Now I think the explanation
Lies in that pocket. If I am wrong, 'tis easy
To prove me so. But if thou hast a secret . . .

F. I have a secret, and you are well informed
I carry it on me. And to prove to all
'Tis of a private nature, I will shew it.
'Tis but this little case. (*Shows case of portrait.*)

D. A portrait-case?

F. A portrait.

D. Ah, then, now we have the truth:
Thou art in love. This is the wondrous sickness
That keeps thee at home when I would send thee
forth:

Distracted thee in drawing of the deed . . .

F. Enough, my lady; you have pushed this far
enough.

D. Oh no! I have now another charge of falsehood.
I have long suspected this; and yesterday
When I did ask thee if thou wert in love,

Thou didst deny it. But thou dost not now—
So tell me who the lady is.

L. (*aside to R.*). All's lost!

F. (*coming quite to front*). Your ladyship must
grant me in private conduct

Some liberty: my honest duty and service
Never surrendered that, and should avail 1893
To spare me this ungenerous inquisition.

D. And very well, sir, if thou hast not transgressed
The rules of the court: these art thou bound to ob-
serve:

And these, as well thou knowest, forbid my ladies
To hide their love affairs from me. Dark meetings,
Intrigue, sly correspondence, and the rest,
Are treason here; nay, they are so well forbidden,
That to conceal them is a breach of trust.
Give me thy word then, Frederick, that this portrait
Is not of any lady in my court,
I'll ask no more.—But if she is of the court,
I'll know who it is. Now speak, and quit thyself.

F. I will not say whether it is so or no.

D. That is confession. I must see the portrait.
Ricardo, now thy judgment.

R. I fear, my lady,
I have too short acquaintance with the rules
Appealed to; and if I offer you my judgment 1910
By such unwritten statutes as obtain
In the best circles that I know, for instance,
The court of Milan . . .

D. What is the court of Milan?

Are we not here at Belflor?—You know the rules,
Laura; speak for me.

L. He must shew the portrait.

(*Coming forward to F.*)

(*Aside.*) All's lost unless I do it.

(*To F.*)

Sir, give it to me.

Judgment hath gone against you. I can promise
No eye shall learn thy secret but the Countess.
To her 'tis due. So give her up the portrait.

(*Aside to F.*) I will exchange them.—

(*F. gives L. the portrait: which the spectators see her
exchange for another. She turns, and, going to
D., presents her with that.*)

D. (*taking*). I thank thee, Laura; and now to learn
the secret:

Who is this wanton traitress? (*Opens case.*)

Ah!—ha! ha!

Impossible,—'tis true. Who would believe it?

Why, friends, there is no secret after all:

No lady,—'tis himself.—

He carries a portrait of himself; himself

Leaning upon his elbow. Now, heaven save me!

This I was told; but tho' my own eyes see it,

I cannot credit it. O, gracious sir,

I have wronged thee, and beg pardon. Yet, I think,

Thou lovest in acquittal. O Frederick, Frederick!

Although thou art a poet, and mayst think

Thou hast a touch of rarer stuff, to make thee

Self-centred;—nay, tho' thou wert more than that,

More than I ever thought thee . . .
 To carry thine own portrait! to have a pocket
 For it! well, well! 'tis a fair picture enough,
 Not undeserving of its jewelled case.
 Poor little image! now I'm sorry for thee,
 Thou hast no lady-lover, but must live
 In thine own pocket, as it were.—Let me have thee,
 I'll keep thee—may I not, Frederick?—a remem-
 brance

Of better hopes. Come, Laura: doth your poet
 Carry his portrait, too? He is distanced quite.

[*Exit D. and L. with FLORA.*

F. By heaven, well saved!

R. What is't? I understand not.
 'Twas your own portrait?

F. Yes; but that I had
 Was Laura's. She having mine, stepped in between,
 And interchanged them.

R. I never saw it. Bravo!—most deftly done.

F. 'Twas touch and go. That meddling devil,
 Tristram, 1950
 He must have told her of it.

Re-enter LAURA.

L. The Countess, Frederick,
 Bids me return the portrait. Thou mayst die
 To look on it, she says,—here 'tis. (*Giving her own.*)

F. Be sure
 This is the right one. Well: she says not ill.
(*Kissing it.*)

See how I prosper. Get you gone, while I
Step in your shoes.

F. Richard, do not be rash:
And if you find she is cured, leave well alone.

R. Trust me: in serving you I serve myself.

[*Exit F.*

Diana hath not been honestly in love.
If 'twere the virtual Frederick she adored
She could not so mistake him. 'Tis but fancy,
Which jealousy hath magnified to passion:
And now she eyes him as the fox the grapes, 1980
And rather than be crossed, she'll be persuaded
That he's an idiot. That's not honest love,—
Fanciful consolations are the comfort
Of fancied passion,—love needs better food.

Enter D.

D. How now, Ricardo? I have not done laugh-
ing yet.

What of my ingenious secretary? I think
'Tis well I trapped him: we might else have searched
For a lady long enough.

R. You are satisfied
By this discovery?

D. Clearly; all is explained.
I came to tell you the campaign is over.
Finding there's nought to seek, the search is ended.
The wonder is, Tristram had solved the mystery,
And told me; but I laughed.

R. Now you believe?

D. Ha! ha!

R. How you must now despise him!

D. I do, indeed.

R. You laugh. 'Tis strange that it should please you.

D. Ah!

I laugh to think there was no cause for all

My . . .

R. Your . . .

D. My needless trouble, my anxiety.

R. Anxiety,—you mean, lest? . . .

D. For my maids.

R. (*half-aside*). Indeed!—indeed!

D. 'Twas more than laughable

To see him; and you there with your face so grave.

R. I thought you were deceived.

D. I was deceived,

But now I understand.

R. Your ladyship,

2002

I think, is more mistaken now than ever.

Frederick hath told me himself that he is in love;

And that's the truth, both likely, and well-confirmed,

Even by the accident you set against it.

You find on him a portrait of himself

Set in a jewelled case; just such a gift

As he might make to his lady. I know, from him,

He hath her picture.

D. Ah! you have seen it?

R. No.

D. Then I am assured there is no other picture
Than that I saw. His servant guessed the truth:

'Twas part of a pretence, for which I think
There may be a cause. There is no lady at all.

R. Tristram's a fool; and wrests what wit he hath
To outwit himself.

D. What then do you believe?

R. I see the stroke your ladyship prepared
Was excellent: the merest chance in the world
Enabled him to escape.

D. Impossible.

This is a dream. Besides, how could he dare
Deceive me again, and wish me to believe
That he is a fool?

R. A false opinion wrongs
The holder most.

D. Never! I cannot think it.

R. You do not wish to think it.

D. And what dost thou, sir,
Think that I wish?

R. One thing at least is clear . . .

D. (*aside*). Good heaven! if I have betrayed myself—

Well, sir!

R. You are vexed to think Frederick should be in love.

D. How so, pray?—how should I be vexed at that?

R. The fear to lose so good a secretary.

D. So good a secretary!—Ha! now, Ricardo, I am vexed, that's the truth, at Frederick's love.—I see how likely it is you are right—I am sorry—

I do not wish to believe it: I thought at first
His lady, whoever she was, might be in the town:
Or, if the affair had sprung within my court,
It might be one of my guests: but now it happens
We have no visitors. If last night he kept
An appointment here in the court,—who can it be
But one of the maids? Are you surprised I am vexed?
I thought well of him, and still would think the best:
I'll not believe it.

R. (aside). I shall not act this out. 2041

I almost dare to tell her all: she tortures
Herself for nothing.—I cannot . . .

D. What say you, sir?

R. 'Tis out of the question, madam.

D. Nay, tell not me.

I know what men will do.

R. If you believe it,

There's but one plan.

D. And that?

R. To send him away.

D. To send him away? Of course I might; I'll
do it:

To-night, Ricardo.

R. (aside). Now we go too fast—

The sooner he goes the better: and yet your plan
Was good, to watch to-night. Now that he thinks
Suspicion lulled too, he will be more rash.

Let Lady Laura watch the garden, and I
His room: even if that fail, 'tis time enough
To send him off to-morrow.

D. . . . I thought when I came in here, Ricardo,
 I had come to the end of the matter: I find instead
 'Tis ten times more involved, doubtful, and difficult.
 For after this exposure, if Frederick stayed,
 Our mutual trust is sapped: and if, as you urge,
 I send him away, there's none to take his place. 2060
 Nor can I do without him. In two days hence
 The wedding is fixed, for which a host of guests
 Are bid to the house. Sir Gregory being so deaf
 Would be overwhelmed: Frederick cannot be spared.
 Yet would he stay if I asked him? Did you hear him
 Threaten he would not take his papers back?
 He sees, no doubt, how necessary he is.

R. No doubt, my lady, he sees that when he is gone
 He cannot be here to help you.

D. Who can help me?
 What is your counsel?

R. Not to ask a favour 2070
 Of one whom you so hotly have charged with wrong.

D. I would not.

R. Sir Gregory then must do his best.

D. 'Tis no solution that.

R. Then what, my lady,
 If I should take the place awhile? I offer
 My service, I would do my best.

D. I thank you,
 Ricardo. I hardly like to accept; and yet
 You have come to know much that I could not tell
 To another.

R. (*aside*). I win. But she must ask me herself.

D. I think I might accept.—What say you?

R. My lady,

I see one difficulty,—I have offered more
Than is quite my own: for being the Duke's servant
I cannot without his leave give pledge to another.

D. Cannot you get his leave?

R. Yes. I will ask it.

And what if Frederick be our messenger?
Send him again to Milan; the very mission
That he played false in: so your dignity
Is salved and explanation saved.

D. 'Tis good.

To-morrow he goes. If you will act in his place—
For some ten days, say?

R. Longer, if it should please you.

D. I thank you, I shall not need it.

R. But if . . .

D. If what?

R. If Frederick should resign, and if the Duke
Gave me permission, might I keep my place?

D. I thank you, sir; I hope there'll be no
need.

R. But may I hope?

D. In truth I know of none
I'd rather see in his place.

R. A thousand thanks!

D. Why thank me so, sir? I am here the obliged.

R. Your ladyship knows not the great desire
I have felt to serve her.

D. I am happy to have inspired it.

It comes to me as a sort of consolation
In my distress—

R. Agreed then that to-night 2100
We watch. If nothing come of that, to-morrow
Frederick is sent to Milan with my letter.
Only your ladyship must be prepared
To lose him. Whoever it is he loves, I am sure
When we discover her, we shall find a passion
Worthy and deep, from which he'll not be moved:
Therefore . . .

D. O, you are mistaken. I know him better.
I know he is cold. Well, well: I thank you. I wish
you

Good evening, sir.—To-morrow, speak we of this—
But I have been much deceived.—Be not concerned,
'Tis nothing. [Faints.

R. (*supporting her to a chair*). Flora!—Here is a
chair, my lady,
You are over-wrought. (*Aside.*) By heaven, what
brutes we are!
'Twere kinder far to tell her at once—Diana!
Dearest Diana! (*Aside.*) What am I doing?—Flora!
Flora!

Enter FLORA.

Fl. My lady in one of her fits!

R. What is it? Look at her, Flora!

Fl. To fan her face,—that's all.
She will come to herself. See, see!

R. (*aside*). This lump's not fit to touch her.—
My lady!—Diana!

D. (*awakening*). Who's there? Ah, Flora!

Fl. My lady

Has fainted again.

D. Ricardo!—yes, I remember. 2120

How foolish.

Fl. All's well, my lady.

D. (*to Fl.*). Give me an arm.

I'll go within.

R. Cannot I help you?

D. Oh, no.

'Tis nothing,—a silly habit I wish I were rid of.

I thank you. Good evening, sir.

R. Good evening, madam.

I promise to bring this all to a happy end.

D. I thank you, sir: I would you might. So,
Flora. [*Exit with FL.*

R. Now, by my soul, Frederick's atrocious!
'Tis brutal of him. He has let this go too far.
She loves him much too well. Good heaven! to
think

He might have had her. I owe him everything
For being so blind, and eager too for his marriage
With Lady Laura. Yes, and thanks to her
For being so ready; and to St. Nicholas
For setting her on: for he in the end appears
As my good genius, tho' he little dreams it.
So far, all prospers—all is in good train.
To-morrow will decide my fate.

ACT III.

SCENE I.

A hall on the first floor of the palace: stairs at the back leading down. A lamp burning below shines on to the stage.

Enter TRISTRAM *and* FLORA *hurriedly.*

Fl. Fly, Tristram, down the stairs: she is coming.

T. O, wala! wala! If she has seen us—

Fl. Quick! And dout the lamp. 2140

[*Exit* R.

T. O, wala! wala!

[Exit down the stairs, back, making a great noise; the lamp suddenly goes out.

Enter DIANA *in robe-de-chambre, with a lamp in her hand.*

D. Stop, sir! stop, stop! I see you: I bid you stop.

Flora, Flora!—I'll ring the alarm. [*Pulls a rope.*

Will no one come?

Enter RICARDO (L.).

R. I heard your ladyship call.

D. He is here, Ricardo: I heard him, I saw him.

R. Where?

D. He ran off down the stairs. Follow him and seize him.

2145

Bring him back here. Quick!

R. Down the stairs?

D. Quick, quick!

[*Exit R. at back.*]

Is this the way I am treated? and not a servant!

Flora! Come, Flora! Flora! is no one awake?

Enter (L.) ST. NICHOLAS hurriedly, half-dressed, carrying suits of clothes, a dressing-case, etc.

D. Stay, sir! where go you?

N. Fire! fire! The palace is on fire! Fly, fly!

D. Stay, sir, I say: the house is not on fire.

N. Where is the fire? Mercy! O, heaven save me!

D. There is no fire at all.

N. No fire! Are you sure?

D. I rang the bell myself to awake the house.

A man broke in.

N. Thieves? Robbers?

D. I do not know.

He has got away. Go, wake Sir Gregory.

N. (going). First let me fetch my sword!

D. Nonsense, St. Nicholas; we need no swords.

Go, wake Sir Gregory, and send him here:

Send him at once. [*Exit N. (L.).*]

Re-enter RICARDO back.

Were you too late, Ricardo? 2160

Did you not catch him? Has he escaped?

R. In the dark,

Whoever it was, had passed the door before me,

And, like a hare, faster than I could follow,

Sped o'er the grass into the house.

D. You saw him?

Where went he in?

R. At Frederick's door. I reached it
In time to hear the key turn in the lock.

D. 'Tis he, then, and escaped in spite of us.
But I'll find out with whom he dares . . .

R. (aside). 'Twas the fool Tristram:
I saw him plainly enough. Should I not tell her?—

D. Ricardo, go and fetch Sir Gregory;
I have sent St. Nicholas for him, but the man
Is scared with terror.

R. (aside). While all goes well with me, the less
I meddle

The better. I'll let her find this out herself.

[*Exit L.*

D. I'll ring the bell again.

Enter the Maids.

So here you crawl at last! I had better keep

No maids at all than such a drowsy troop.

Not frightened by the fire-bell! You must have

Wondrous good consciences. Now, tell me at once—

'Twas all delusion, that I never heard
 A man at all. That what Ricardo saw
 Was but a bush, a shadow, a bat, an owl
 He frighted from the ivy: and so in the end
 All will make light of it. 2200

G. Heigh! Give me a light.
 The lamp has been extinguished on the stairs.
 I'll go and search about.

[*Takes a light from one of the maids, and Exit, back.*

R. (*aside*). I'll stay and watch.

D. Now, ye dissemblers, stand forth one by one
 And answer me.

R. (*aside*). This will seal Frederick's fate.
 She must betray her mean suspicion, and I
 Witness the degradation of her idol.—

(*The maids are congregated at back, R. as they come out of the passage. They stand forth singly to be questioned, and come in turn to front, R.*)

D. Dorothy first. Dost thou know, Dorothy,
 What man it was whose voice I heard up-stairs;
 Who, when I left my room and gave the alarm,
 Ran out?

Dor. I do not know, my lady.

D. I ask

Didst thou not see or hear him?

Dor. No, my lady. 2215

D. Thou wert asleep?

Dor. I was asleep, my lady.

D. Then stand aside. Now, Kate.

Dor. (aside). Here's a fine game!

D. Sawst thou or heardst thou anything?

K. No, my lady.

D. Nothing at all?

K. Nothing at all, my lady.

D. Wert thou asleep?

K. I was asleep, my lady. 2220

D. Step thou aside. Now, Flora.

K. (to Dor.). Will she lie?

Dor. (to K.). Trust her.

D. Now, Flora, answer.

Fl. I am grieved my lady

Should think I could deceive her.

D. I did not ask

If you deceived me. Heard you any noise?

Did you see any man?

Fl. Not I, my lady.

Dor. to K. (aside). Oh! oh!

D. Were you asleep?

Fl. I was asleep, my lady.

D. Then stand aside.

Fl. (aside to K.). Did she believe me?

K. (to Fl.). Well!

Thou'st got a brazen face!

Dor. (do.). Art thou not shamed?

D. Marcela next. Didst thou hear anything?

Mar. I heard no noise until my lady called.

D. Thou wert asleep?

Mar. I was asleep, my lady.

D. 'Tis strange. Stand thou aside.

Dor. (aside). Now then for Rose.

Mar. (do.). She really was asleep.

Fl. (do.). Then what shall come?

D. Now, Rose, thou'rt left alone. Thy fellow-servants

Have all denied the thing of which some one

At least is guilty. Thee I did not suspect:

But do not fear to tell the truth. Who was it?

Tell me who is thy lover. No tittering there!

Your levity makes you all accomplices,

Ay, every one.

Rose. My lady, I have no lover. 2240

D. Tell me who this man was.

Rose. I do not know.

I heard no noise till Marcela awoke me.

D. Didst thou awake her, Marcela?

Mar. Yes, my lady.

She was asleep. Rose always speaks the truth.

It wasn't Rose.

D. You are all then in one plot:

Or shame has made you lie. But never think

To escape. I know the gentleman, and know

He visits one of you: and which it is

I'll learn to-night: unless perhaps you'll say

He makes love to you all.

Mar. Indeed, my lady,

He is quite a proper man.

Dor. And all his courtship

Has been most regular.

D. Come, come: confess.

Who is it?

Fl. It's me, my lady. I must confess.

D. Flora!

Fl. Forgive me, I beg; for I abjure
I never asked him: but, as I often tell him,
He takes such liberties; which, as you know him,
I need not tell your ladyship: and 'tis true
We have been some time engaged.

D. Engaged!—to you!
Here's a fine story!

R. (*aside*). She has not said his name. 2259

Fl. Indeed, 'tis true, my lady; and I am sure
My lady will pardon me. And since he hath told me
How kind your ladyship hath been to him . . .

D. By heaven, I'll have you whipped,—whipped!

Fl. O, my lady!

D. And speak of marriage, you impertinent hussy!

Fl. It was the money which your ladyship gave
him,

That made us think of marrying.

D. Worse and worse!
To spend my present on my waiting-maid.—
O thy pretension! thy pretension! Think you
He really loves you?

Fl. Why not?

Maids. Ay, why not?

D. What hath he ever said to make you think
He loves you, Flora?

Fl. He told me very often,
Before I'd have him . . .

D. Ah!

Kate. And that I warrant.
He's not one of your struck-dumb mumbling sort,
That haven't a word.

D. Silence! And tell me, Flora,
Something he has said.

Fl. He calls me his little love,—his duck: 2275
And says a hundred thousand pretty things
As often as we meet.

D. A hundred thousand!
His compliments are cheap. Duck, too!

Fl. My lady,
'Tis what men say. It does not mean a duck.

Kate. 'Tis true, my lady; 'tis a common saying.

D. Silence! No one of you dare from this
moment
To speak to me. You are all alike disgraced.
And, that you are not more shamed, disgraced the
more.

I shall discharge you all.

Kate. What! and Rose too!

D. To-morrow morning. Bút, Flóra, for you
I cannot think of punishment sufficient.
Merely to have had a lover,—to have concealed it,—
To have even admitted him by night,—were nothing,
Had the affair been . . .

*Re-enter SIR GREGORY up the stairs with TRISTRAM'S
hat, holding it up.*

G. Found on the stairs,—the intruder's hat, my
lady: 2290

He had thrown it on the lamp to extinguish it,
And thereby is detected.

R. (*aside*). Now's revelation.

D. Why,—but whose hat is this?

Fl. 'Tis his, my lady.

R. Is not this Tristram's hat?

D. (*aside*). Hath he come hither in his servant's
clothes?

Fl. It's Tristram's hat.

K. At least what's left of it.

D. Came he disguised?

Fl. 'Twas thus, my lady. As he ran down the stairs,

I bade him dout the lamp. I did not mean
That he should burn his hat.

D. (*aside*). What can this be? 2300

It can't have been Tristram.—Answer me, Flora: Was it master Tristram visited you to-night?

Fl. Of course, my lady. I'd not deny it.

D. (*aside*). I see!

After all, only Tristram.—Came he alone?

Answer me at once.

Fl. I am much ashamed, my lady,
He came alone. And yet, my lady, I swear
I never bade him; nor asked him, for that matter.
I heard his step, and found him waiting there
By the big clock. How he came in I know not.

D. Enough: I shall discover. All leave but
Flora.

[*Exeunt maids except FL.*

(*Aside.*) Thank heaven they have not guessed . . .
and yet how nearly

My jealousy betrayed me! (*To FL.*) I told you, Flora,
I shall discharge you. Tho' I do not doubt
Tristram came here without your invitation,
Yet in concealing his pretensions from me
You have disobeyed,—deceived me.

FL. I was afraid

My lady would forbid him.

D. Silence, girl!

Go to your room. I'll speak of this to-morrow.

FL. I hope my lady will forgive his boldness.
I have told my lady all.

D. Begone! begone! [*Exit FL.*

(*To R.*) What think you of this, Ricardo? 2320

R. 'Tis the wrong fox we have hunted.

D. Ah, I think

Fox is the word. I half believe that Frederick
And Tristram are in league.

R. I guessed the truth

When Flora first confessed.

D. I was too hot.

R. You think too ill of Frederick.

D. Nay, Ricardo:

Do not defend him. 'Tis enough to shame him
That Tristram is his servant.

G. I pray my lady

Will now retire.

D. Yes, true, Sir Gregory.

'Tis time, high time. And let this trophy here

Be sent to its owner; and to-morrow morning
 Bid him come speak with me. Tell him, Ricardo.
 Good-night. [*Exit GREGORY lighting her out, R.*

R. I am now secure of her: since in my presence
 She hath so consented to disgrace her idol.
 He is quite dethroned: she knows too that I know.
 He is past recovery. Could she but have seen him
 Walking with Laura in the garden, plotting
 Their flight to-morrow! And I to climb by such
 A ladder of comedy, tottering with laughter,
 To love's very heaven! After three years of pain
 Three days of farce, disguise, and folly; and then,
 Suddenly win my joy!

Re-enter SIR GREGORY.

And thou, Sir Gregory, 2341
 Shalt be my major-domo.

G. Eigh!

R. (taking his arm). I say,
 Sir Gregory, I'll have you for my major-domo.
 [*Exeunt.*

SCENE II.

*FREDERICK'S room; open portmanteaus, &c., lying
 about. Near the fireplace R. is a cupboard with
 key in lock. A table in centre.*

Enter FREDERICK carrying music, and TRISTRAM.

F. All my clothes are in, you say, Tristram?

T. Everything, sir.

F. You pack well, Tristram: put in these (*handing music*). Is there room for the music?

T. Anything, sir. Lie there, ye wrigglers. (*Begins to sing himself.*)

F. And this book.

T. Where is it you may be going, if you please, sir? 2350

F. Never mind. You pack very well, Tristram.

I shall miss you.

T. If the Countess has sent you to Milan, will you not want your best black velvet doublet?

F. I shall wear that on the journey.

T. Wear your best black velvet on the road!

Well!—Stay we long away, sir?

F. Never mind. Now shut it up and give me the key.

T. I should like to know, sir, how long we stay away, and when we are to start.

F. Give me the key. Now, Tristram, I understand that the Countess has dismissed you from her household. That saves me explanation. Here's your wages (*puts money on the table*) for the current quarter. You are no more my servant.

T. Good heavens! do you discharge me, sir? I beg, what have I done to offend you?

F. Never mind.

The Countess has discharged you,—that's enough. Tho' you're a fool, Tristram, to say the truth, I have got accustomed to you, and shall be sorry To part with you. I have quite as many reasons

For wishing you to stay, as you have given me
 To be dissatisfied. But so 'tis fated; 2375
And what God willeth, Tristram, needs must be
After the opinion of certain clerkës.

T. I am not to go with you to-day to Milan?

F. No, Tristram. Now we part.

T. Consider, sir,
 That Flora is discharged as well as me:
 Cannot you take us with you?

F. You and Flora
 With me!

T. What shall we do, sir? What shall we do?

F. I'll tell you what. While you were in my service

You served me ill, pryed into my affairs,
 Took bribes to spy upon me:—I know,—attend.
 If you would win my favour, you must serve me
 Now you are discharged. You can assist me, and if
 You serve me better, I'll use my interest, Tristram,
 To get you a decent place.

T. What is't to do?

F. 'Tis this. An hour from hence I must be off.
 St. Nicholas will likely enough be here 2391
 After his marriage settlement. Now, Tristram,
 He must not find me. Wait for him here:—do you
 see?—

And if he comes, get him out of the way.
 And if Ricardo comes, tell him that I
 Am gone to seek him and shall soon return:
 Bid him await me here. If by your help

I get off quickly, I will help you; if not,
Tristram, I'll cut your throat from ear to ear. [*Exit.*

T. Heavens! what has possessed my master, and what's to happen to me? O wala, wala! It all comes of love: or rather, I should say, it all came of my hat. I would it had been consumed entirely. This hole in the crown is not to be mended . . . and all round it 'tis like tinder, it breaks with a touch. Of what contemptible material are these hats made! It might have been sewn up else. Now 'tis a picture of me. Yes, the hat is me, as it were; the hole in the crown is the ruin of my fortunes wrought upon me by the fiery lamp, which is my love for Flora. There's a parable. Could I write a poem on this, it might appease the Countess. Deary me! What are Flora and I to do? Money being the root of all evil, I must look first to that. All depends on that. Let me see what I can muster. There's my pay; there's the Countess' present, and my little savings. (*Turns out his purse and pockets on to the table.*) I'll put it all in heaps of ten. No, heaps of five: better in fives, there'll be more heaps; and there's comfort in the number of heaps. Tho' less lordly, 'twill be more showy. Five, ten, fifteen, twenty. (*Knocking at door.*) Come in,—twenty-five.

Enter ST. NICHOLAS.

N. Tristram! Where's your master?

T. Twenty-five. My master's no more. Twenty-six.

N. Frederick is dead?

T. (singing). What dead, my dearie?

Oh no, my dearie.

N. What is this nonsense, Tristram?

T. When I meet with a poet, St. Nicholas, I can speak poetry. 2430

N. I came to see your master, Tristram; and you said he was dead.

T. I said he was no more, not that he was dead: and, as I say, he is no more my master. I am, as 'twere, a gentleman at large; and I sit here by invitation, engaged on my own affairs, which do not need assistance.

N. I came to see your master on important business, Tristram. Be civil enough to tell me where he is.

T. My master is nowhere. This was twenty-six.

N. I shall wait for him here.

T. Well, if you choose to wait, I know what you come after. 'Tis not the sonnet.

N. When will Frederick be back, Tristram?

T. But I'll give you back your sonnet, if you will write me a poem about my hat, this hat. 'Tis but to versify my own imaginations. See! I am the hat: the hole in it is my discharge: the flame which burnt the hole is Flora,—that's the Countess' maid. All is good. There's the blackness of the hat, the fire of the lamp, the abysm of the hole: it lacks but the moon, which you might shift to see through the crown; and if you could weave in with that your

sphinx and something about death, I think that I might tickle the Countess' ear to reconsider of my discharge; for she loves poetry.

N. Curse thy impertinence, Tristram. Where's thy master?

T. I will shew you where your master is, if you curse me or aught of mine, master Nick.

N. Darst thou speak to me thus?

T. Did you not call me a thief, and base-born clown?

N. Art thou not both?

T. Whate'er I be, Mr. Poet, I have now no master, nor any obligation to any gentleman to make believe for his convenience that thou art aught. Thou! Why, thy brainpan hath nought in it but shoddy, I warrant. Thou combed ass! thou left-handed goose! —to curse me!

N. By heaven, I cannot away with thee.

T. No, that you can't. (*Aside.*) I have it. I'll shut him in the screeky cupboard.—Well, sir: I know what you come after. 'Tis the marriage papers, is it not? I was bid see to them. Look in that cupboard.

N. Ah! are they there? (*Goes to cupboard and looks in. T. pushes him behind, and shuts door on him, locking it.*)

T. There curse me, and seek your papers.—(*Aside.*) I think I have him now. If this does not satisfy my master, I'll never try to please him again.

N. (*within*). Let me out at once. There are no papers here. What did you shut me in here for?

T. To follow your occupation—to lounge, lounge in the cupboard. Am I a thief?

N. Let me out, I beg of you, Tristram.

T. Not till you have made my poem, or told me a cure for the rheumatics. Ay, bawl and kick: I will finish my accounts. Kick away, one for each pile. Twenty-six it was: twenty-seven, twenty-eight, twenty-nine, thirty. Why, you overdo it: you kick by the ducat. With three and a half (*pocketing*), thirty-three ducats and a half. Silence! silence! 'Tis more kicks than half-pence, as they say. If you will be quiet, I will give you back your sonnet. (*Takes it out and reads*)—

Master of mine, remember for pitie.

Ha! who's your master now?—I will recite the end part, which I have never read.

*Once in a vesture of pale crimson came
That willowed Archdelight, whose eyes are dim
With gazing on a book of writhing flame: 2501*

My stars! and no wonder neither.

*And with him Hope, the stringless harp-player,
Himself an emblem, harped in mine ear
His long-lost Sapphic song and nuptial hymn.*

Hem! Very good, sir, as far as it goes. You should finish this and have it ready by the wedding.

See! I will thrust it to you under the door. Won't you take it back? If I have not charmed him to sleep with his own verses! Ha! he bites—he lives. (*N. pulls it to him from within.*) (*To himself.*) This is very well. But I wonder why my master wished him out of the way; and why he is sent to Milan; and taking all these things with him; and why he is travelling in that doublet. He hath no care for his clothes. Yet I'll do him a last service, and brush it for him. 'Tis sadly dusty. (*Having taken it down.*) He shall not say that his old valet neglected him in aught. So lie there. (*Puts doublet on table.*) Pockets full, of course. If I were a gentleman, I'd have no pockets. How can velvet lie? How can one smooth it down, stuffed out in a lump like this . . . an old handkerchief, I'll warrant . . . no . . . a glove: a lady's glove: a very secret affair: one he hath stolen to write verses on. I shall tell the Countess of this. (*Knocking at door heard.*) This will be Mister Ricardo, I suppose. Come in!

Enter SIR GREGORY.

G. Tristram, where's your master? Not at home?

T. shakes his head.

G. Do you know where he is?

T. shakes.

G. Has St. Nicholas been here?

2530

T. nods.

G. Is he gone?

T. nods.

N. (kicking harder). Sir Gregory! Sir Gregory!
I am here!

G. Do you expect your master soon?

T. nods.

G. I may sit and await him?

(*T. bows and gives a chair. G. sits to table. T. takes doublet from table. The glove falls on the floor. G. takes out papers, and lays them on the table to read them.*)

T. (hanging up doublet). Now shall the cupboard-door speak to the old gentleman. (*Pretends to busy himself. N. makes a great knocking.*)

G. Come in! There is some one at the door, Tristram.

T. shakes.

G. I think there is. (*Goes to door and opens it: finds no one, and returns.*)

(*Aside.*) Frederick is unaccountably remiss,
Most unaccountably remiss.—

Tristram, I am sure I hear a noise. What is it?

T. (going up to G., shouts in his ear).

They are sweeping the chimney in the next room, Sir Gregory.

G. Ah.—You would much oblige me, Tristram, if you would go and seek your master, and tell him that I am here.

T. (nodding). I can't refuse, and I've done my duty by St. Nicholas. Yet 'tis sad to miss any of this play. I will go, and be back in a trice. (*Pass-*

ing the cupboard, to N.). Thou silly! he'll never mind thee.

N. Curse you, Tristram!

T. Hush thee, my babe. [Exit.

G. (*walks about restlessly.*)

The man's as strange as his master. How Diana
Can trust her affairs to one so wholly unfit,
So unmethodical! And what discomfort
The fellow lives in. The room in such disorder:
He might be going away for good. Two such 2560
Immense portmanteaux. What's all that for now?
There is something going on that I do not know
of . . .

Tristram's discharged . . that's true. (*Sees glove on
floor; and picks it up mechanically to put it on
the table.*) A lady's glove!

Yes, 'tis a lady's; thrown upon the floor.

What see I? that embroidery . . 'Tis Laura's;

Laura's. St. Nicholas hath been here.—

No, no. Yet the only other explanation . . .

It cannot be . . . I see it all . . 'Tis true . .

Her tears and strange farewell to me this morn-
ing:

Her treatment of St. Nicholas: and Frederick,

Why he mistook the contract . . . these portman-
teaux.—

By heaven, by heaven, there's no time to lose:

They're off. (*Going out, passes close to cupboard.*

N. *makes more noise than ever.*)

Ha!—Heigh!

'Tis here, then: not in the chimney. Eh!—who's here?

(*Opens cupboard.*) St. Nicholas!

N. O, Sir Gregory, you would not hear.

G. Who shut you in the cupboard?

N. Tristram.

G. Tristram?

N. assents.

G. And is this Laura's glove? Look at it.

N. (nodding). It is.

G. Then tell me: did you bring it here? Could you

By any chance have dropped it here?

N. (disclaiming by gesture). I? No sir.

I came to seek for Frederick.

G. (to himself). What can this mean, 2580

Unless to keep his rival out of the way?—

Listen, St. Nicholas, I have discovered something

Concerns you nearly.—I think—I am sure—

Nay: I'll not tell you what I suspect . .

'Tis but suspicion. But you have been, I fear,
Most shamefully beguiled.

N. Ay, that I was.

He said that I should find my settlement
In the cupboard.

G. Patience. I will go to Laura
And learn the truth. Meanwhile, seek out the Countess,
And beg her give me an interview at once.

I'll come to the ante-chamber. By heaven, St.
 Nicholas . .
 And yet I scarce know . . . There's no time to
 lose:
 Come quickly. [*Exeunt.*

SCENE III.

A room in the palace.

DIANA and FREDERICK.

D. You say you start at once.
F. The coach is waiting.
D. Here is my letter: give it to the Duke.
 The answer is not urgent: it may keep you
 A day or two at Milan.
F. You wish, my lady,
 I should return?
D. Why not?
F. I understood
 Your ladyship to accept my resignation.
 It lies with her convenience but to fix 2600
 The day of my dismissal.
D. Do you wish
 To leave my service?
F. I could never serve
 Where I am distrusted.
D. Would you reconsider
 Your angry speech, I would make some concession.

F. I had cause for anger.

D. That I would concede.

But I too was provoked; and in the end

I came off worst.

F. Not so, my lady.

D. I sought

To learn your secret, and was merely fooled.

F. I understand not how your ladyship
Was first provoked,—at least with me.

D. Nay, true: 2610

'Twas a mistake. We need no explanation,
And may be friends again.

F. I cannot offer
Her ladyship my services.

D. You leave me?

F. 'Tis better that I should. I thank your ladyship
For many kindnesses. I pray sincerely
You may be better suited.

D. No fear for that,
Frederick: for by my soul I think
There is no other man would so have wronged me
As thou hast done. . . My only fault hath been
To have thought too well of thee. But do not dream
I am unprepared. I have seen thro' thee, Frederick;
Yes, thro' and thro'. My offers of concession
I made to prove thee, lest thou shouldst pretend
That I was unforgiving. In the letter
I have writ the Duke, thou bearest the commission
Of thy successor. Henceforth I reject thee:

And treat thee as thou deservest. Go, sir, go!
Indeed, I care not whether thou go or not.

F. I have then your leave to stay away?

D. My leave?

I bid thee go, and never see me more. 2630

I have done with thee, sir. Go! [*Exit F. bowing.*

And that's the man I loved; the man for whom

I sank to jealousy. Who is't he loves?

He love! The fool was right: he loves himself.

Now will he bide at Milan. Ah, good sir,

Thy lady is not there, and yet thou goest

Most cheerfully,—thou goest. And it was thou

Didst write soft verses: music too,—thy music.

And I thinking I loved thee was betrayed

A thousand times . . and to be scorned—by thee!

Scorned for another. (*Weeps.*)

Enter N. hastily.

N. My lady, I pray.

D. (*going off*). Nay, sir: I cannot see you.

N. But listen a moment. Tristram locked me in
the cupboard . . .

D. What is this? I cannot see you.

N. But Sir Gregory sent me to entreat an inter-
view at once,—he said at once.

D. Then tell Sir Gregory that I will see him in
half an hour; until that time let no one disturb me
on any account,—not even Sir Gregory. [*Exit.*

N. I'll be well satisfied. I'll be revenged.

To shut me half an hour in a dark cupboard,
With all the flock and flue, 'mong cast-off clothes,
Old boots and shoes: call me an ass, a goose,
And mock my muse . . a fellow . . a common
fellow.

A man that is the servant of the servant
Of the adoptive sister of my Laura!
He shall be swinged. Sir Gregory will right me:
Sir Gregory will avenge me. Had heaven but given
me

His inches, why, I'd do it myself. I'd flog
him, 2660

Till he cried mercy, mercy! mercy, St. Nicholas,
 Mercy, I pray! No, no: no mercy, sir.
 Down on thy knees! No mercy, sir, from me.
 No mercy. (*Beating a chair.*)

Enter SIR GREGORY.

G. St. Nicholas, where's the Countess?

N. (*shouting*). She says that she will see you in half an hour.

G. In half an hour!—Nay, I must see her at once. You have been betrayed.

N. I have. I have been betrayed.
But you shall see me avenged.

G. And I must see her at once. (*Going in.*)

N. (*withstanding him*). She bade me say
She could not see you.

G. Do not stay me, man;
Your happiness is at stake.

N. Nay, she forbade it.

She said in half an hour.

G. (half aside). Why does he stay me?
In half an hour he says. What can I do?
By that time he'll be off. (*Aloud*). St. Nicholas!
His coach is at the door: in half an hour
'Twill be too late: He will have got away.
Go to the stables, mount yourself at once
With three or four of the grooms, and ride together
To the further gate of the park. There wait for

Frederick's carriage:

Stop it. If she is within, I give you warrant 2680
To bring them back: if she be not within,
Follow. She awaits him somewhere on the road.
Wherever it be, take them, and bring them back:
You have a father's warrant.

N. Who is it you speak of, sir?

G. Heigh!

N. Whose carriage shall I stop?

G. Why, Frederick's.

N. And who's the lady?

G. Who is the lady, ask you? Why Laura, my
daughter.

N. Laura with Frederick!

G. I went to her room: she's flown, and with a
maid.

She hath packed up clothes and gone. I am right,
I am sure.

N. And shall I stop them?

G. Lose no more time. Begone! Do as I bid.

N. There's some mistake; Laura with Frederick!
Why we were to be married!

G. Fly! fly! St. Nicholas, else 'twill be too late.
[*Exit N.*

The man's a dolt: he'll never be in time,
And I that call him fool, why what am I? 2700
With my grey hairs—and such an idiot,
Not to have seen! And if I had only known
That Frederick loved my Laura, and she him . . .
Why did they never tell me? My dearest Laura, . .
To marry without my knowledge, . . . run away
Without my blessing . . . it shall not be . . . as if
Against my will . . . not to ask my consent . .
And count on my approval. O Laura, Laura!
If I had known—and now no doubt
'Tis past all hindrance . . . Am I not a fool
To wish to stop them? Perhaps they have not
started,
I may be in time. I will tell Frederick all,—
I do not disapprove . . nay, I approve.
'Tis better far . . and yet how can I?—
My word is plighted to St. Nicholas.
'Tis better they should get clear off. Heaven speed
them!
Why did I send that idiot after them?
I wish they may escape. O Laura, Laura!
Without my blessing. Yet thou hast my blessing.
God bless thee! I try and hinder thee? O no.
I will go stop St. Nicholas. [*Hurries out.*

SCENE IV.

FREDERICK'S *room as before.*

Enter FREDERICK *and* RICARDO.

F. (hastily). Good-bye: I'm off. Speed you as well as I.

Laura is to meet me in the park: an hour
Will put us out of reach.

R. Farewell. God speed you!
All is prepared at Milan; and ere you are married,
I shall be accepted.

F. Write me word.

R. I will.

F. I'll not believe it till I see your hand.

R. Not if Diana write herself?

F. To me?

That might persuade me. Good luck to you, Richard!
And thanks for all your favours.

R. Favours! eh! 2730
To an old friend! Well. Good-bye!

F. Good-bye.

[*Taking up coat, exit.*]

R. (leisurely). He's gone. Bravo! give him two
minutes more

And he will be clean gone: and when he is gone
I shall not fear to tell Diana all.—

He is lost to her; and that I have won her liking
Ends her caprice. Now, 'tis my pleasant duty

To send my letter to Sir Gregory (*takes out letter and peruses it*),

And open his eyes: he must not be left groping.

(*Looking it over.*) First who I am; and what I have done, and do

To assist his daughter in her happy match. 2740

When he knows that, he'll bless me: and he must tell

Diana of Frederick's marriage; but of me

Keep counsel awhile—better to put that plainer.

(*Goes to inkstand and writes.*)

Yet a slight hint of something to Diana,

If I could manage it, would serve me well.

Enter TRISTRAM.

(*Still writing.*) Ah, Tristram: come in, Tristram:

(*Aside.*) This leaky fool is just the man to do it.—

Lend me your company for half an hour.

T. Your company! here's wonders. I never knew you ask that before. 'Twas always stand off, Tristram: and you may go, Tristram: and we don't want you, Tristram. What's come to you now, that you ask my company?

R. Your master's gone, Tristram; and I shall feel lonely.

T. My master is gone: and, as I believe, many thanks to you. I don't know why ever you came here; but since you came all has gone wrong: there's been more secrets and less sense: and now my master, or I should say, my late master, has quarrelled

with the Countess and me; and I am turned loose on the world.

R. Do you want a fresh place, Tristram?

T. If I did, you are scarcely the man I should look to; thank you all the same.

R. I could give you some good advice.

T. I don't want your advice neither, sir.

R. You love secrets, though: I have one I could tell you.

T. I have had enough of secrets. I wish you could tell me something that isn't a secret.

R. It's no secret, Tristram, that you love Miss Flora.

T. No, damn it: but it was a secret: and the best of them all. But now my master's gone, I dare tell you a secret, sir. I always disliked you extremely from the first: and I don't think better of you now.—I have to put a few things together before the maids come to do the room; and if you don't go, I shall leave you to be dusted out. 2780

R. Wait, Tristram: I can teach you better manners. And I have a service to ask of you. Here's a purse to help you and Flora. (*Giving.*)

T. Well, this is a different matter. I am sure, sir, I am very much obliged to you. But I never saw the colour of your money before. (*Aside.*) More ducats!

R. No: because you served me better by trying to disoblige me. Now I pay you to oblige me in a trifling matter. 'Tis to find out Sir Gregory and deliver this letter to him.

T. Certainly, sir. Is there anything else that you may require, sir!

R. Yes. Just light me a taper, and I'll seal the letter. You see I don't trust you altogether, Tristram: not yet.

T. You may, sir. I want no more of Mr. Frederick's secrets. Not that they were at all times unprofitable, though he never himself gave me a penny on their account. 2300

R. (*having sealed*). Here 'tis. Will you please take it at once.

T. (*taking*). I will, sir. (*Aside.*) More secrets still: and more ducats. [*Exit.*

R. Enough should grow to reach Diana's ears
From Tristram's curiosity. Meanwhile
I'll watch my time. My rival's safely gone . .
But how to face Diana? I think 'tis best
To take her by surprise: a weaker force
Then overwhelms. I will go change my dress. 2810
[*Exit.*

SCENE V.

*The hall up-stairs, or other room in palace. TRISTRAM
and FLORA meeting.*

T. Ha, Flora! where's Sir Gregory? What red eyes: blubbering!

Fl. I am discharged, Tristram, discharged. The Countess has discharged me for keeping company with

you. And she has been crying too, to have to part with me. What ever will come to us?

T. What matters? I'll cheer thee, girl. Look here! More money. There's five pieces of gold: and all for carrying this letter to Sir Gregory. Where is he?

FL. Who gave it you?

T. That Mr. Ricardo. It's a mystery, Flora: but there's something in it, I do believe.

FL. Mr. Ricardo?

T. Ay. Who should he be that scatters gold, and seals with a crown, look! and says that he will find us new places, and all sorts of fine promises? A man that would flick me away whenever I came near him.

FL. Did he, Tristram? 2830

T. Ay, that he would. But I heard him say once that he came here for his cure. I take it he's cured now; and he would make friends all on a sudden, and begs me kindly carry this to Sir Gregory. 'Tis his farewell no doubt. He will go home, and take me with him.

FL. And me too?

T. Not if you blubber. Where's Sir Gregory?

FL. I don't know. The Countess has bid me go seek Lady Laura.

T. Come! I'll with you as far as the library, where I think I should find the old gentleman.

[*Exeunt.*

Enter DIANA.

D. Rejected! by the man I loved rejected:

Despised by him, and by myself betrayed!
And all will know it—I could not hide it.

Our nature hath this need: woman must love.
But oh! to have made my idol of a stone,
To my worship a deaf unanswering stone!
At last I am cured. Since not my rank suffices
To set me above the rules I gave my maids, 2850
I'll never love. Am I to stand and wait,
Till some man fancy me, and then to melt
And conjure inclination at a nod?
O man, thou art our god: the Almighty's curse
Crowns thee our master: from the green-sick girl
That mopes in worship of the nearest fool,
To the poor jaded wife of thirty years
Who dotes upon her striker, 'tis the same. . .
That's not for me. Nay, give it up altogether:
Go free. If man's so base; if that high passion,
That spirit-ecstasy, that supersensual,
Conscious devotion of divinity
Of which I dreamed, is only to be found
In books of fanciful philosophy,
Or tales of pretty poets . . . why then away
With books and men! my life henceforth shall
prove

Woman is self-sufficing: in my court
No man shall step, save such as may be needed
To show my spirit holds them in contempt.
Women shall be my friends and women only; 2870
And I shall find allies. I had in Laura
All that I could desire, a friend, unselfish,

Devoted, grateful, and as yet untainted
 By any folly of love: and her I schemed
 To marry away. 'Tis not too late: I'll save her:
 She shall not be enslaved: she doth not love.
 Her heart is free and generous; it has shrunk
 By instinct from the yoke: she will join with
 me;
 And if I tell her all,—or if she have guessed,—
 Now when I tell her she will comfort me.
 Comfort and counsel, friendship, that I need
 And she can give. I never will part from her.

Enter FLORA.

Fl. Oh, my lady: the Lady Laura is gone, she has run away.

D. Run away!

Fl. Sir Gregory is coming to tell you all about it. She has run away with Mr. Frederick.

D. Nonsense! How dare you tell me . . .

Fl. I guess it's true though. I remember now I used to say how strange it was that such a sweet lady, and so clever and proper a gentleman as . . .

D. Silence, Flora! What has come to you? What makes you say this?

Fl. Because she's not to be found. But Sir Gregory will tell you.

D. Send Sir Gregory at once. (*Aside.*) This is impossible, impossible.

Fl. See here he comes.

D. (*aside*). Ah! if this were Frederick's secret!

Enter SIR GREGORY.

What is it, Sir Gregory, tell me. 2900

G. I scarce dare tell your ladyship the tidings
I have to bear.

D. (aside). It's true! it's true!

G. My daughter

Has run away with Frederick.

(DIANA sinks on a chair; FLORA runs to fan her.)

Ah! my lady!

What have I done? I was too quick.

D. Nay, nay,

Flora, begone. I can hear all. You knew it?

G. I had not the least suspicion of the truth;
Altho' it needed but the merest trifle
To clear my sight. I chanced to find her glove
In Frederick's room. All flashed upon me at once.
I ran to seek her. She was gone. A message
She left was given me, that she would be away
All the afternoon: but since she had taken with her
A valise . . .

D. She, 'twas she . . . O most dissembling,
Ungenerous, ungrateful . .

Fl. I said 'twas true.

D. Begone at once I bid you. [Exit FLORA.]

G. I ran in haste

To tell your ladyship; but for some reason
Could not be admitted: so I took such steps
To arrest them as I might . .

D. Ha! they are seized?

G. I have since repented of my haste: a letter
 Put in my hands reveals the whole: 'tis passed 2920
 Beyond prevention. It has been maturing
 Under our eyes for months. We must give way.
 'Tis strange we never guessed it. This very morning
 I was in Laura's room; and when we parted
 She made such long farewells, and looked at me
 With such reluctance, and such brimming eyes,
 I saw she had some trouble untold; and thinking
 'Twas her dislike of Nicholas, I repented
 I had ever urged the match. I little thought,
 Dear girl, 'twas sorrow that she dared not tell me
 Her joy.

D. (*aside*). Her joy! no doubt! Here's a fine
 father!
 What doth he wish? Ah, doubly have I been fooled.
 How plain 'tis now to see. The only one
 I have never once suspected; the only one
 It could have been. And Frederick must have told
 her

My love of him. All I would have kept secret
 And thought was hid, hath been as open as day:
 And what I sought to learn hath been kept from me
 By them I trusted to discover it.
 Tristram, no doubt, whom I supposed a fool, 2940
 Hath merely played with me. Thank heaven they
 are gone.

I'll never see him again. Befeooled: befooled.

G. They have been befriended by the Duke of
 Milan.

D. The Duke of Milan too!

G. It was his letter

I spake of. Frederick is, he tells me there,
His old school-friend; he begs my pardon for him,
Will fête the bride and bridegroom in his palace,
And have the Archbishop marry them. 'Tis thither
They are fled.

D. Then all this is a plot of the Duke's!

G. (*aside*). I dare not tell her more.

D. Who brought the letter?

G. I wish my dear girl joy. She has chosen well.

D. Who brought the letter?

G. Tristram gave it me.

D. (half aside). How came he by it?

Enter TRISTRAM.

T. My lady! I have something now.

D. Tristram, I bade you leave the court: how dare you

Appear before me again?

Silence, I say! I know your news: you have served
Your master with such lying skill, I wonder
He did not take you and your Flora with him:
There was not room enough perhaps in the coach
For two such couples.

T. How, if you please, my lady, 2960
Are Flora and I two couples?

D. Silence. Tell me
How you get letters from the Duke of Milan.

T. How I get letters from the Duke of Milan?

D. There's nothing now to hide, so tell the truth.

T. I swear, my lady, that I know no more
Of the Duke of Milan than a babe unborn.
Your ladyship accused me once before
Of having been at Milan, when 'twas plain
That I had not gone, and never wished to go.
Knowing my lady's strong impartiality, 2970
I should not venture.

D. This will not do.

Enter RICARDO.

*G. beckons T. aside, and during D.'s first speech
whispers him, and G. and T. go out.*

R. My lady,

The culprit is discovered.

D. Ah, Ricardo!

I had forgot . . was this thy plan? . . if so
I cannot praise thy skill sufficiently.
All hath gone well. And since no doubt thou hast
served

Thy master and his friend in all thou hast done,
And under the pretence of aiding me
Hast been the ready man, more than another,
To practise on me, and do me injury;
I'll school my patience till I have satisfied
My curiosity to know what thought
Urged thee,—whom I confess I wholly trusted,
And whom I thought to have made my friend,—that
thus

Against the laws of hospitality,
Without the excuse of passion, thou shouldst wrong
A lady so unkindly.

R. Ah Diana!

Hast thou not guessed my secret?

D. By heaven, sir,

Did the Duke send thee here to insult me too?

R. Dearest Diana, I am the Duke of Milan.

D. Ha! thou! Thy face behind the bush. 'Tis
thou.

Should I have known it? No. I can thank God
I knew it so little. By help tho' of thy acts
I recognise your grace. 'Tis like thee indeed,
That has not scrupled thus to steal upon me
Masked and disguised; by forgery and falsehood,
Written recommendations of thyself,
Making thee out to be some gentleman 3000
Of trust and honour. Oh, 'tis admirable,
The use thou makest of thy rank, to creep
Into my secrecy, thereby to assist
Thy friend, my secretary, to elope
With an orphan and my ward. Haste, haste! I bid
thee;

Lest thou be late for the feast. Bear them from me
My glad congratulations. (*Sinks on a chair.*)

R. (*running to her*). Diana! Diana!

D. I need no aid from thee, sir. Nay, begone!

R. In kindness hear what I came here to say.

In justice hear my answer to the charges
Thou hast made. But first I claim my promise.

D.

How!

What promise, sir?

R.

Your secretary's place

If Frederick left.

D.

Make you me still your jest?

R. O dearest Diana, think not that I jest.

I'd be thy secretary all my life,

3015

So I might only take the place which Frederick

Held in thy affections.

D. (rising).

In my affections! why,

What means your grace, I beg?

R.

Diana, Diana!

Have I not won thee? Did I not obey thee

By silence and long absence, till my life

Grew desperate, and my misery made me bold

To come to thee disguised? I thought that thou

Perchance wert adverse to my suit for thinking

I loved thee only for thy beauty's sake,—

Since at first sight I loved and only sight,—

And for thy mind's grace thou wert rightly jealous

Of such a passion. Now, if I guess well,

I have won some favour in these happy days . . .

D. Favour!

R.

And if thou hast dreamed thou hast

loved another,

'Tis no impediment: for first this man,

3030

Whom thou hast honoured is my nearest friend;

And not to have loved him were to have disregarded

The only part of me thou ever knewest.

But him, for very lack of loving rightly

Thou hast much mistaken and wronged, and, as I think,

Now for misunderstanding barest ill-will.

D. I bear him no ill-will, your grace.

R.

Nor me?

D. But what you have done?

R.

Love can excuse me all.

What woman judges by proprieties

The man who would die for her, and who without her
Regards not life? Passion atones my fault.

D. Your only excuse is your offence.

R.

'Tis thus:

If I am not pardoned, I am not loved; but if

I am loved, I am pardoned. If thou sayst to me

I never knew thee, but I know thee now,

And like thee not: thy three years' love for me

I count for nothing, thy devotion nothing,

Thy misery nothing: thy adventure here

I set against thee; and the hour thou goest

I shall lose nothing: If thou canst say this, 3050

Speak . . and I promise

To turn away for ever. Is that thy mind?

D. Is't possible?

R.

What possible?

D.

Thy—truth.

R. My love? Nay, love's a miracle, a thing

That cannot be where it seems possible,

And where 'tis most incredible is most worth

Our credit.

D.

That is true.

R. That thou didst doubt
Was worthy of the greatness of my love.
But now I claim thy faith. Thou mayst believe,
Thou must believe. Indeed, indeed, Diana,
Thou mayst believe. Look'st thou to find love
strong?

I have heavenly security:—devoted?
I have no self but thee:—patient? I plead
Three years of patience:—humble? I was content
To be thy servant:—wise? I knew thee better
Than thou thyself; I knew that thou must love:
Or is love tender?—See my childish tears
Crowd now to hear my sentence.

D. Ah, this were love,
If it were só.

R. Diana, it is so.
There is nought to-day in all the world but this, 3070
I love thee.

D. Alas! how was I wrong! Sir, sir!
Thou bringst me, or at least thou seemst to bring
me

The gift of God. Whether it be so or no
How can I tell? 'Twould wrong it—nay, I cannot
Take it in haste. I cannot. I understand.
Nay, leave me. I know not what to say . . your
blind

Attachment is't not cured?

R. Cure all but that
By my acceptance. (*Kneels.*) I am thy true lover,
Thy only lover. Bid me rise beloved.

Conventions of society, and preferring
 The unwritten statutes of the court of Milan, 3100
 Have joined to act a lie, and me, your friend,
 Deceived and wronged, whom ye had done well to
 trust.

One only honourable course is left—
 My judgment on you is that you be married
 As soon as may be. Therefore, Frederick,
 I beg that you will draw the contract up
 Between yourself and Laura with all speed.
 And that my sister shall not lack a portion,
 I will endow her with as goodly a sum
 As what St. Nicholas promised. Now this time
 Let there be no mistake.

N. What's this, Sir Gregory?
 Cannot you hear?

F. Your ladyship, I am bound
 For ever to your service.

L. (to D.). Am I forgiven, Diana?

F. (to R.). Richard, how's this?

R. (to F.). I have won. (*Aloud.*) And let me
 say

That I for friendship's sake will do as much 3125
 Toward Lady Laura's portion as the Countess.

N. Sir Gregory . . Sir Gregory!
 Is this the way I am treated? You do not hear?
 Sir Gregory, speak!

G. (to N.). I hear not what is said, St. Nicholas:
 But I can see: and since you have caught your
 bride

Running away, you must not look to me
To help you hold her. Surely what I promised
I promised in good faith: but what hath happened
Sets me at liberty. (LAURA *goes to* GREGORY.)

N. And I am left out?

Am I a sacrifice?

D. Sir, be consoled:

You were not more deceived than I.

N. At least

Tristram shall not escape. I do beseech you
He may be punished for stealing my sonnet,
And shutting me in the cupboard.

Enter TRISTRAM *and* FLORA.

D. Who come here?

T. and Fl. My lady, we ask for pardon.

R. I take on me

To speak for them.

D. No need for that, your grace;.

They are forgiven.

N. Why doth she say 'your grace'?

T. (to R.). Ah, why 'your grace' indeed?

R. This Tristram here

Hath done us many a service. Flora too

Hath played a useful part. May not their marriage
Follow on ours, Diana?

N. Yours!

T. (to audience, sympathetically). His!

D. They may have so much promise with all my heart.

T. Thank you, my lady.

I never did understand anything in the "Humours of this Court," and I never shall. 3150

THE END.

NOTE.—The Humours of the Court is founded on two Spanish comedies, which, when I read them, appeared to me to be variations of the same story. These are Calderon's *El secreto á voces*, and Lope's *El perro del hortelano*; the latter already used by Molière. My play owes its plot to Calderon, and to Lope the first scene of its third act, which is the opening scene of *El perro del hortelano*. But since in that play the secretary is actually detected in what, in my play, he is only falsely suspected of, and yet, in spite of this, is married by Lope to the Countess, it may be judged that Lope's play is something farcical. I believe this is a full statement of my indebtedness, for where I have borrowed incident I have not, that I remember, translated.



POEMS.



I.

THE WINNOWNERS.

BETWIXT two billows of the downs
The little hamlet lies,
And nothing sees but the bald crowns
Of the hills, and the blue skies.

Clustering beneath the long descent
And grey slopes of the wold,
The red roofs nestle, oversprent
With lichen yellow as gold.

We found it in the mid-day sun
Basking, what time of year
The thrush his singing has begun,
Ere the first leaves appear.

High from his load a woodman pitched
His faggots on the stack :
Knee-deep in straw the cattle twitched
Sweet hay from crib and rack :

And from the barn hard by was borne
A steady muffled din,
By which we knew that threshéd corn
Was winnowing, and went in.

The sunbeams on the motey air
Streamed through the open door,
And on the brown arms moving bare,
And the grain upon the floor.

One turns the crank, one stoops to feed
The hopper, lest it lack,
One in the bushel scoops the seed,
One stands to hold the sack.

We watched the good grain rattle down,
And the awns fly in the draught;
To see us both so pensive grown
The honest labourers laughed:

Merry they were, because the wheat
Was clean and plump and good,
Pleasant to hand and eye, and meet
For market and for food.

It chanced we from the city were,
And had not gat us free
In spirit from the store and stir
Of its immensity:

But here we found ourselves again.

Where humble harvests bring
After much toil but little grain,
'Tis merry winnowing.

II.

THE AFFLICTION OF RICHARD.

LOVE not too much. But how,
When thou hast made me such,
And dost thy gifts bestow,
How can I love too much?

Though I must fear to lose,
And drown my joy in care,
With all its thorns I choose
The path of love and prayer.

Though thou, I know not why,
Didst kill my childish trust,
That breach with toil did I
Repair, because I must:

And spite of frightening schemes,
With which the fiends of Hell
Blaspheme thee in my dreams,
So far I have hoped well.

But what the heavenly key,
What marvel in me wrought
Shall quite exculpate thee,
I have no shadow of thought.

What am I that complain?
The love, from which began
My question sad and vain,
Justifies thee to man.

III.

SINCE to be loved endures,
To love is wise :
Earth hath no good but yours,
Brave, joyful eyes :

Earth hath no sin but thine,
Dull eye of scorn :
O'er thee the sun doth pine
And angels mourn.

IV.

THE GARDEN IN SEPTEMBER.

Now thin mists temper the slow-ripening beams
Of the September sun : his golden gleams
On gaudy flowers shine, that prank the rows
Of high-grown hollyhocks, and all tall shows
That Autumn flaunteth in his bushy bowers ;
Where tomtits hanging from the drooping heads
Of giant sunflowers, peck the nutty seeds,
And in the feathery aster bees on wing
Seize and set free the honied flowers,
Till thousand stars leap with their visiting :
While ever across the path mazily flit,
Unpiloted in the sun,
The dreamy butterflies
With dazzling colours powdered and soft glooms,
White, black and crimson stripes, and peacock eyes,
Or on chance flowers sit,
With idle effort plundering one by one
The nectaries of deepest-throated blooms.

With gentle flaws the western breeze
Into the garden saileth,

Scarce here and there stirring the single trees,
For his sharpness he vaileth :
So long a comrade of the bearded corn,
Now from the stubbles whence the shocks are borne,
O'er dewy lawns he turns to stray,
As mindful of the kisses and soft play
Wherewith he enamoured the light-hearted May,
Ere he deserted her ;
Lover of fragrance, and too late repents ;
Nor more of heavy hyacinth now may drink,
Nor spicy pink,
Nor summer's rose, nor garnered lavender,
But the few lingering scents
Of streakéd pea, and gillyflower, and stocks
Of courtly purple, and aromatic phlox.

And at all times to hear are drowsy tones
Of dizzy flies, and humming drones,
With sudden flap of pigeon wings in the sky,
Or the wild cry
Of thirsty rooks, that scour ascare
The distant blue, to watering as they fare
With creaking pinions, or—on business bent,
If aught their ancient politics displease,—
Wheel round their nested colony, and there
Settling in ragged parliament,
Some stormy council hold in the high trees.

V.

So sweet love seemed that April morn,
When first we kissed beside the thorn,
So strangely sweet, it was not strange
We thought that love could never change.

But I can tell—let truth be told—
That love will change in growing old;
Though day by day is nought to see,
So delicate his motions be.

And in the end 'twill come to pass
Quite to forget what once he was,
Nor even in fancy to recall
The pleasure that was all in all.

His little spring, that sweet we found,
So deep in summer floods is drowned,
I wonder, bathed in joy complete,
How love so young could be so sweet.

VI.

LARKS.

WHAT voice of gladness, hark!
In heaven is ringing?
From the sad fields the lark
Is upward winging.

High through the mournful mist that blots our day
Their songs betray them soaring in the grey.
See them! Nay, they
In sunlight swim; above the furthest stain
Of cloud attain; their hearts in music rain
Upon the plain.

Sweet birds, far out of sight
Pour songs of pleasure,
Dome us with joy as bright
As heaven's best azure.

VII.

THE PALM WILLOW.

SEE, whirling snow sprinkles the starv'd fields,
The birds have stayed to sing;
Their fairy harbour yet no foliage shields.
When cometh Spring?
Ah! in their tiny throats what songs unborn
Are quenched each morn.

The Lenten lilies, through the frost that push,
Their yellow heads withhold:
The woodland willow stands a lonely bush
Of nebulous gold;
There the Spring-goddess cowers in faint attire
Of frightened fire.

VIII.

ASIAN BIRDS.

IN this May-month by grace
of heaven things shoot apace.
The waiting multitude
of fair boughs in the wood,
How few days have arrayed
their beauty in green shade!

What have I seen or heard?
it was the yellow bird
Sang in the tree: he flew
a flame against the blue;
Upward he flashed. Again,
hark! 'tis his heavenly strain.

Another! Hush! Behold,
many like boats of gold
From waving branch to branch
their airy bodies launch.
What music is like this,
where each note is a kiss?

The golden willows lift
 their boughs the sun to sift:
Their silken streamers screen
 the sky with veils of green,
To make a cage of song
 where feathered lovers throng.

How the delicious notes
 come bubbling from their throats!
Full and sweet how they are shed
 like round pearls from a thread!
The motions of their flight
 are wishes of delight.

Hearing their song I trace
 the secret of their grace.
Ah, could I this fair time
 so fashion into rhyme,
The poem that I sing
 would be the voice of spring.

IX.

JANUARY.

COLD is the winter day, misty and dark :
The sunless sky with faded gleams is rent;
And patches of thin snow outlying, mark
The landscape with a drear disfigurement.

The trees their mournful branches lift aloft :
The oak with knotty twigs is full of trust,
With bud-thronged stems the cherry in the croft;
The chestnut holds her gluey knops upthrust.

No birds sing, but the starling chaps his bill
And chatters mockingly; the newborn lambs
Within their strawbuilt fold beneath the hill
Answer with plaintive cry their bleating dams.

Their voices melt in welcome dreams of spring,
Green grass and leafy trees and sunny skies :
My fancy decks the woods, the thrushes sing,
Meadows are gay, bees hum and scents arise.

And God the Maker doth my heart grow bold
To praise for wintry works not understood,
Who all the worlds and ages doth behold,
Evil and good as one, and all as good.

X.

A LINNET.

PINK-THROATED linnet on the topmost bough
Of the leafless oak, what singest thou?
Hark! he telleth how—
“Spring is coming now; Spring is coming now.

Now ruddy are the elm-tops against the blue sky,
The pale larch donneth her jewelry;
Red fir and black fir sigh,
And I am lamenting the year gone by.

The bushes where I nested are all cut down,
They are felling the tall trees one by one,
And my mate is dead and gone,
In the winter she died and left me lone.

She lay in the thicket where I fear to go;
For when the March-winds after the snow
The leaves away did blow,
She was not there, and my heart is woe:

And sad is my song, when I begin to sing,
As I sit in the sunshine this merry spring:

Like a withered leaf I cling
To the white oak-bough, while the wood doth ring.

Spring is coming now, the sun again is gay;
Each day like a last spring's happy day."—

Thus sang he; then from his spray
He saw me listening and flew away.

XI.

I NEVER shall love the snow again
 Since Maurice died :
With corniced drift it blocked the lane,
And sheeted in a desolate plain
 The country side.

The trees with silvery rime bedight
 Their branches bare.
By day no sun appeared; by night
The hidden moon shed thievish light
 In the misty air.

We fed the birds that flew around
 In flocks to be fed :
No shelter in holly or brake they found.
The speckled thrush on the frozen ground
 Lay frozen and dead.

We skated on stream and pond; we cut
 The crinching snow
To Doric temple or Arctic hut;
We laughed and sang at nightfall, shut
 By the fireside glow.

Yet grudged we our keen delights before
Maurice should come.
We said, In-door or out-of-door
We shall love life for a month and more,
When he is home.

They brought him home; 'twas two days late
For Christmas day:
Wrapped in white, in solemn state,
A flower in his hand, all still and straight
Our Maurice lay.

And two days ere the year outgave
We laid him low.
The best of us truly were not brave,
When we laid Maurice down in his grave
Under the snow.

'ΕΠΙΓΡΑΜΜΑ.

Fight well ye best, yet count your courage nought ;
The brave were perfected before they fought.

XII.

A SONG of my heart, as the sun peered o'er the sea,
Was born at morning to me:
And out of my treasure-house it chose
A melody, that arose

Of all fair sounds that I love, remembered together
In one; and I knew not whether
From waves of rustling wheat it was,
Recoveringly that pass:

Or a hum of bees in the queenly robes of the lime:
Or a descant in pairing time
Of warbling birds: or watery bells
Of rivulets in the hills:

Or whether on blazing downs a high lark's hymn
Alone in the azure dim:
Or a sigh of pines, when the midnight wold
Is solitary and cold:

Or a lapping river ripple all day chiding
The bow of my wherry gliding
Down Thames, between his flowery shores
Re-echoing to the oars:

Or anthem notes, wherever in archéd quires
 The unheeded music twires,
And centuries by, to the stony shade
 Flies following and to fade :

Or a homely prattle of children's voices gay
 'Mong garden joys at play :
Or a sundown chaunting of solemn rooks :
 Or memory of my books,

Which hold the words that poets in many a tongue
 To the irksome world have sung :
Or the voice, my happy lover, of thee
 Now separated from me.

A ruby of fire in the burning sleep of my brain
 Long hid my thought hath lain,
Forgotten dreams of a thousand days
 Ingathering to its rays,

The light of life in darkness tempering long ;
 Till now a perfect song,
A jewel of jewels it leapt above
 To the coronal of my love.

XIII.

FOUNDERS' DAY.

A SECULAR ODE ON THE NINTH JUBILEE
OF ETON COLLEGE.

CHRIST and his Mother, heavenly maid,
Mary, in whose fair name was laid
Eton's corner, bless our youth
With truth and purity, mother of truth!

O ye, 'neath breezy skies of June,
By silver Thames's lulling tune,
In shade of willow or oak, who try
The golden gates of poesy;

Or on the tabled sward all day
Match your strength in England's play,
Scholars of Henry, giving grace
To toil and force in game or race;

Exceed the prayer and keep the fame
Of him, the sorrowful king, who came
Here in his realm a realm to found,
Where he might stand for ever crowned.

Or whether with naked bodies flashing
Ye plunge in the lashing weir; or dashing
The oars of cedar skiffs, ye strain
Round the rushes and home again;—

Or what pursuit soe'er it be
That makes your mingled presence free,
When by the schoolgate 'neath the limes
Ye muster waiting the lazy chimes;

May Peace, that conquereth sin and death,
Temper for you her sword of faith;
Crown with honour the loving eyes,
And touch with mirth the mouth of the wise.

Here is eternal spring: for you
The very stars of heaven are new;
And aged Fame again is born,
Fresh as a peeping flower of morn.

For you shall Shakespeare's scene unroll,
Mozart shall steal your ravished soul,
Homer his bardic hymn rehearse,
Virgil recite his maiden verse.

Now learn, love, have, do, be the best;
Each in one thing excel the rest:
Strive; and hold fast this truth of heaven—
To him that hath shall more be given.

Slow on your dial the shadows creep,
So many hours for food and sleep,
So many hours till study tire,
So many hours for heart's desire.

These suns and moons shall memory save,
Mirrors bright for her magic cave;
Wherein may steadfast eyes behold
A self that groweth never old.

O in such prime enjoy your lot,
And when ye leave regret it not;
With wishing gifts in festal state
Pass ye the angel-sworded gate.

Then to the world let shine your light,
Children in play be lions in fight,
And match with red immortal deeds
The victory that made ring the meads:

Or by firm wisdom save your land
From giddy head and grasping hand:
IMPROVE THE BEST; so shall your sons
Better what ye have bettered once.

Send them here to the court of grace
Bearing your name to fill your place:
Ye in their time shall live again
The happy dream of Henry's reign:

And on his day your steps be bent
Where, saint and king, crowned with content,
He biddeth a prayer to bless his youth
With truth and purity, mother of truth.

JUNE, MDCCCXCI.

XIV.

NIGHTINGALES.

BEAUTIFUL must be the mountains whence ye come
And bright in the fruitful valleys the streams,
wherefrom

Ye learn your song:
Where are those starry woods? O might I wander
there,
Among the flowers, which in that heavenly air
Bloom the year long!

Nay, barren are those mountains and spent the
streams:

Our song is the voice of desire, that haunts our
dreams,

A throe of the heart,
Whose pining visions dim, forbidden hopes profound,
No dying cadence nor long sigh can sound,
For all our art.

Alone aloud in the raptured ear of men
We pour our dark nocturnal secret; and then,
As night is withdrawn
From these sweet-springing meads and bursting
boughs of May,
Dream while the innumerable choir of day
Welcome the dawn.

- XV.

THE north wind came up yesternight
With the new year's full moon,
And rising as she gained her height,
Grew to a tempest soon.
Yet found he not on heaven's face
A task of cloud to clear;
There was no speck that he might chase
Off the blue hemisphere,
Nor vapour from the land to drive:
The frost-bound country held

Nought motionable or alive,
That 'gainst his wrath rebelled.
There scarce was hanging in the wood
A shrivelled leaf to reave;
No bud had burst its swathing hood
That he could rend or grieve:
Only the tall tree-skeletons,
Where they were shadowed all,
Wavered a little on the stones,
And on the white church-wall.—

Like as an artist in his mood,
Who reckons all as nought,
So he may quickly paint his nude,
Unutterable thought:

So Nature in a frenzied hour
By day or night will show
Dim indications of the power,
That doometh man to woe.
Ah, many have my visions been,
And some I know full well:
I would that all that I have seen
Were fit for speech to tell.—

And by the churchyard as I came,
It seemed my spirit passed
Into a land that hath no name,
Grey, melancholy and vast;
Where nothing comes: but Memory,
The widowed queen of Death,
Reigns, and with fixed sepulchral eye
All slumber banisheth.
Each grain of writhen dust, that drapes
That sickly, staring shore,

Its old chaotic change of shapes
Remembers evermore.
And ghosts of cities long decayed,
And ruined shrines of Fate
Gather the paths, that Time hath made
Foolish and desolate.
Nor winter there hath hope of spring,
Nor the pale night of day,
Since the old king with scorpion sting
Hath done himself away.

* * * * *

The morn was calm; the wind's last breath
Had fal'n: in solemn hush
The golden moon went down beneath
The dawning's crimson flush.

XVI.

NORTH WIND IN OCTOBER.

IN the golden glade the chestnuts are fallen all;
From the sered boughs of the oak the acorns fall:
The beech scatters her ruddy fire;
The lime hath stripped to the cold,
And standeth naked above her yellow attire:
The larch thinneth her spire
To lay the ways of the wood with cloth of gold.

Out of the golden-green and white
Of the brake the fir-trees stand upright
In the forest of flame, and wave aloft
To the blue of heaven their blue-green tuftings soft.

But swiftly in shuddering gloom the splendours fail,
As the harrying North-wind beareth
A cloud of skirmishing hail
The grievéd woodland to smite:
In a hurricane through the trees he teareth,
Raking the boughs and the leaves rending,
And whistleth to the descending
Blows of his icy flail.
Gold and snow he mixeth in spite,
And whirlleth afar; as away on his winnowing flight
He passeth, and all again for awhile is bright.

XVII.

FIRST SPRING MORNING.

A CHILD'S HYMN.

Look! Look! the spring is come:
O feel the gentle air,
That wanders thro' the boughs to burst
The thick buds everywhere!
The birds are glad to see
The high unclouded sun:
Winter is fled away, they sing,
The gay time is begun.

Adown the meadows green
Let us go dance and play,
Or look for violets in the lane,
Or ramble far away
To gather primroses,
That in the woodland grow,
And hunt for oxlips, or if yet
The blades of bluebells show.

There the old woodman gruff
Hath half the coppice cut,
And weaves the hurdles all day long
Beside his willow hut.

We'll steal on him, and then
Startle him, all with glee
Singing our song of winter fled
And summer soon to be.

XVIII.

A VILLAGER.

THERE was no lad handsomer than Willie was
The day that he came to father's house :
There was none had an eye as soft an' blue
As Willie's was, when he came to woo.

To a labouring life though bound thee be,
An' I on my father's ground live free,
I'll take thee, I said, for thy manly grace,
Thy gentle voice an' thy loving face.

'Tis forty years now since we were wed :
We are ailing an' grey needs not to be said :
But Willie's eye is as blue an' soft
As the day when he wooed me in father's croft.

Yet changed am I in body an' mind,
For Willie to me has ne'er been kind :
Merrily drinking an' singing with the men
He 'ud come home late six nights o' the se'n.

An' since the children be grown an' gone
He 'as shunned the house an' left me lone :
An' less an' less he brings me in
O' the little he now has strength to win.

The roof lets through the wind an' the wet,
An' master won't mend it with us in 's debt:
An' all looks every day more worn,
An' the best of my gowns be shabby an' torn.

No wonder if words had a-grown to blows;
That matters not while nobody knows:
For love him I shall to the end of life,
An' be, as I swore, his own true wife.

An' when I am gone, he'll turn, an' see
His folly an' wrong, an' be sorry for me:
An' come to me there in the land o' bliss
To give me the love I looked for in this.

XIX.

WEEP not to-day: why should this sadness be?
Learn in present fears
To o'ermaster those tears
That unhindered conquer thee.

Think on thy past valour, thy future praise:
Up, sad heart, nor faint
In ungracious complaint,
Or a prayer for better days.

Daily thy life shortens, the grave's dark peace
Draweth surely nigh,
When good-night is good-bye;
For the sleeping shall not cease.

Fight, to be found fighting: nor far away
Deem, nor strange thy doom.
Like this sorrow 'twill come,
And the day will be to-day.

THE END.

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